

Factories restart

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While most of the factories outside the EPZ have resumed operation, a small number of those remained closed yesterday for reconstruction or fearing further violence.

The owners of the factories have assured the employees of full payment of wages for this month despite the disruption of production.

"Though our investors are worried about the incidents in the last few days, the situation is normal now. Our workers were not involved in violence," said Kamal Akhtar, general manager of the EPZ.

"We have decided to grant leave for workers who are absent today (Thursday). We have not marked them absent as we know our workers had no links to last three days' violence," said GM Hannan, manager (administration) of A-One (BD) Ltd, which was set on fire on Monday.

About 61,215 workers out of 64,318 yesterday joined duty in 81 factories out of 84 at the EPZ, including its extension. As the workers started turning up at the EPZ main entrance early in the morning, the authorities asked them over microphone to carry identity card or gate pass with them.

Three factories—Leni Fashion, GB Garment and Crylon—declared vacation to let the situation turn normal.

The owners visited their factories yesterday and asked the officials to make an estimate of the losses for submission to the authorities concerned and the insurance companies.

Representatives from insurance companies also visited the affected factories.

The badly damaged or burnt factories have started reconstruction.

Large contingents of BDR, Rab and police were guarding all important points and factories on Dhaka-Aricha, Dhaka-Baipail-Chandra and Dhaka-Tongi-Ashulia highways and inside the EPZ.

Commerce Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Home Luffozzaman Babar and a BGMEA-team yesterday afternoon visited the affected factories including Bando Design Ltd, Envoy Groups and Universe Knitting Factories.

They also visited the factories inside the EPZ.

"We condemned violence at the factories that has not only affected the

owners but also the nation and the country. The incidents were designed to tarnish the good image of our industrial sector that earned 76 per cent of our export income," said Hafizuddin. "Action will be taken against the persons involved in the conspiracy, and my ministry will provide assistance to the affected owners."

Babar said, "It is a conspiracy by our competitors to destroy the garment sector in our country. Suspicious persons were seen at the spots of violence and we are working on it. We will protect our country as well as our industry at any cost."

Prof Abdus Shahid, chief whip of the opposition, also visited Savar yesterday.

"Most of the factories resumed operation peacefully and without any untoward incident," said Abdus Salam Murshed, acting president of the BGMEA.

Most of the garment factories at Tongi, Konabari, Mouchak, Boardbazar and Salna areas in Gazipur also resumed operation, reports a correspondent in Gazipur.

Meanwhile, a Gazipur court yesterday granted bail to trade union leader Mushfeka Mishu. She was produced before the court as she fell sick during a five-day remand.

Highway

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At 3:30pm, JCD members put another barricade on the highway at Tajpurbar under Osmaninagar Police Station for an hour.

Later, the ruling party men again barricaded the highway at Kuruabazar, Begumpur and Sherpur.

Around 100 JCD supporters of Ilyas gathered at a community centre in the city's Zindabazar area at 3:00pm yesterday to bring out a protest procession.

Arif's men also gathered at Zindabazar but police restrained both the groups.

Meanwhile, seven ward commissioners of Sylhet City Corporation in a joint statement condemned Wednesday night's attack on Ilyas' residence and demanded immediate arrest of those responsible.

President

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president, as he is the head of state.

The statement requested all to follow the information provided by the speaker's press secretary, the spokesperson for the president and Bangabhaban, and contact him if needed.

Meanwhile, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar started carrying out his responsibilities as acting president from the Bangabhaban yesterday morning.

A notification issued Wednesday afternoon said that as per article 54 of the constitution, the speaker would perform as the acting president during the illness of President Iajuddin.

The acting president came to Bangabhaban from the speaker's residence yesterday morning. On his arrival at the Bangabhaban, the acting president was greeted by Secretary to the President Abu Mohammad Maniruzzaman Khan, Military Secretary to the President Major General ANM Muniruzzaman and Press Secretary to the President M Mokhlesur Rahman Chowdhury.

Crossfire

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Justice M Awlad Ali and Justice Zinat Ara issued the rule upon a writ petition seeking enforcement and protection of fundamental rights.

Home secretary, inspector general of police (IGP), DIG of Dhaka Range, DMP Commissioner and officer-in-charge of Lalbagh Police Station have been made respondents in the case.

Moving the petition, Advocate M Ruhul Amin Bhuiyan submitted that the "extra-judicial killing" under police custody, as published in a national daily on May 23, is unlawful and violation of fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution.

Mizanur Rahman, a lawyer, filed the writ petition in first such case in recent times against death in "crossfire" of an accused in fetters.

HC slaps ban

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Moving the petition, AF Hassan Ariff, counsel for the petitioner, submitted that under provision of Jaldahar Shongrokhhan Ain (Act No 36 of 2000), changing the nature and character of any water body by any individual or government or any company or statutory body, including Rajuk, is strictly prohibited.

Regarding gas supply guarantee, Manzer said, "Tata is now seeking gas supply guarantee for 10 to 14 years instead of 20 plus years. This guarantee is required for obtaining finance for the projects."

"So the impugned acts of the government and its statutory body in filling the water body, destroying the ecological balance, stands illegal, unlawful, and is of no legal effect," the counsel said.

14-party asks

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High Court verdicts in favour of a revised voter list, the opposition combine set fire to a symbolic electoral roll and threatened to go to court if their demands were not met.

Addressing the rally, 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil MP said election has to be held under revised voter list. He also asked the government to let the countrymen know about the 'real condition' of the president.

Jalil, also the general secretary of the AL, blamed the government for pushing the country into a deep uncertainty.

AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzak MP demanded immediate resignation of the prime minister for her failures to ensure uninterrupted power supply across the country.

Tofail Ahmed, also an AL presidium member, said no election could be held under the 'highly controversial' CEC and two other commissioners.

Suranjit Sengupta MP said they would lodge a case against the EC men for misappropriating Tk 260 crores in the name of drafting fresh voter list. "You (CEC) must have to resign within the next seven days," Suranjit asked.

Presided over by the city 14-party coordinator Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, the rally was also addressed, among others, by Obaidul Quader, Syed Zafar Sazzad, Mukul Bose and Abdur Rahman.

Outlaw killed

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village in the upazila.

Rab men arrested Rahim at Bhetigram under Chatmohar upazila of Pabna on Tuesday.

According to his statement, they took him to Ratowal village at about 4:00am yesterday to recover hidden firearms and ammunition.

Sensing the presence of the Rab men, Rahim accomplices opened fire, forcing the members of the elite force to retaliate.

Rahim received bullets during the shootout and died instantly, Rab sources said.

Police said the outlaw was wanted in 12 cases, including nine for murder, filed with Raninagar and Atrai police stations.

Still room for improvement

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Bangladesh is likely to get only the floor price of \$1.5 to \$2 after 4-5 years as the forecast prices of fertiliser and steel in the global market are set to go down within the next five years. Their prices have shot up in the last two years. Gas price should be linked to oil price in the global market, the experts added.

"The government should bargain on both the floor price of gas and the ceiling of price," one expert stressed.

The experts believe that in the best interest of both Tata and Bangladesh, the government should have the revised proposal reviewed by one or more independent economists.

"The revised proposal is a clearer document than the earlier one and it would be easier for the government to have it reviewed this time," noted an energy expert requesting anonymity. "Before the government finalises its decision on the proposal, it must have a clear idea about the benefits of Tata's proposal."

Except for the gas issue, the experts appreciated various new aspects of the Tata offer.

According to Tata Group's Resident Director S Manzer Hussain, the new offer gives Bangladesh 10 percent equity participation, which would stand at around \$110 million. Tata will also arrange this fund for Bangladesh, and it will be up to the government to decide if it wants to offload the shares in future.

"The government will not have to pay anything. It will have no liability," Manzer said. The idea behind giving this share to the government is to closely involve the government in the Tata investment, he added.

Tata will also float Initial Public Offering (IPO) in the share market of Bangladesh so that local investors are able to participate in the investment. The company has not officially spelled out how much shares will be offered but said this would have a significant impact on the country's share market.

Besides, the company has committed a number of social welfare-oriented activities that include setting up a training institute for farmers, a school and a 50-bed hospital at different plant sites.

Regarding gas supply guarantee, Manzer said, "Tata is now seeking gas supply guarantee for 10 to 14 years instead of 20 plus years. This guarantee is required for obtaining finance for the projects."

Int'l community

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violence and intimidation, to advance its political objectives.

About the United States of America's (USA) stance on the elections, Butenis reiterated that the US would not take any side. "We are not taking and will not take any sides. We are committed to help Bangladesh have a fair and credible election. We support the process, not any particular party," she added.

Replying to a question, the US ambassador said corruption, violence, fraud, opposition to dialogues and intimidations are impediments to free and fair elections.

Referring to her yesterday's meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice MA Aziz, Patricia Butenis said the CEC assured her that he would honour the Supreme Court (SC) verdict on preparation of electoral roll.

She said a good number of international observers from USA, Commonwealth countries, European Union (EU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other organisations as well as local observers would monitor the next elections. "We are hopeful and positive to have fair elections in Bangladesh," she added.

"For the sake of Bangladesh's political, economic and social future, it is essential all those responsible for extremist or political violence both in current and in the past be identified and brought to justice," she said.

On the Trade Bill pending before the US Senate seeking duty and quota free access of Bangladeshi products to American market, Butenis said Bangladesh's exports to USA have increased 20 per cent.

She said Bangladesh exports stood at \$2.7 billion against import of \$318 million, of which 98 per cent is ready-made garments (RMG). She said Bangladesh should pursue its case through World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime.

Answering another question about American investments in Bangladesh, the ambassador said the investment process is not as transparent and fair as one would hope for in Bangladesh. If the American companies were not fairly treated, they might go elsewhere. Besides, political violence, hartal and uncertainty scare away the investors.

Asked if violence in the garment industry would cast negative impact on US buyers, she said she does not think it would cast impact on US companies, but if it continues to happen, people will think twice. "Violence is not the way to address the issue, it must be resolved peacefully," she added.

When asked about Bangladesh

On gas price, he noted, "We have indicated that gas is a raw material for both fertiliser and steel. Its price affects both steel and fertiliser. That is why we want to tag gas price with the international commodity price index. The fertiliser and steel produced in Bangladesh have to be competitive."

Gas price will have two components—fixed and variable. Fixed component is the minimum guaranteed price and variable component is addition to the fixed component. Variable component will derive from the international prices of fertiliser and steel (through a pricing formula), keeping the total price within the ceiling of \$4 per mcf.

"In the long term, variation of gas price will be two to four dollars and it will rather be closer to four dollars," Manzer claimed. "This particular price offer is the highest among any other gas-based steel manufacturer."

The revised proposal also changed the configuration of power plants. Instead of 1,000 MW coal-fired power plants, Tata is now proposing a 470 MW gas-based captive power plant at the steel plant site, from which it can supply 125 to 150 MW to the national grid. It will also install a 250 to 300 MW coal-fired plant at Barakupuria.

"We slashed the idea of coal-based plant because coal-fired power is expensive. It will cost more than 5 cents per kilowatt hour (as against 2.78 cents for the gas-based Meghnaghat power)," he pointed out. But, if there is demand for coal-fired power, Tata will add another 250 MW of it later.

The mode of payment between the government and Tata will be both in dollar and taka. For fertiliser, which will be mainly for export, payment will be made in dollar. For power and steel, payment will be made in taka by the government.

"Bangladesh will not face any kind of balance of payment problems to pay Tata in dollars as export earnings will also increase," said Manzer.

"We expect a response or an indication from the government by the end of this month. Then we can have discussions and adjustments to the proposal. Let us sign a Memorandum of Understanding that will pave the way for subsequent agreements. Contracts are lengthy process. We believe by June-July next year, we can have a financial closure and by 2010, we can start commercial production."

On Tata's gas pricing proposal, a local expert said this was tailored

after the Kafco gas pricing formula, which was re-negotiated in 2001. "Back in 2001, price of oil was much lower than what it is now. Fertiliser price at that time was 180 dollars per bag. The context has now changed. Besides, Kafco is not an ideal deal to follow."

He went on, "According to the Tata formula, if price of fertiliser exceeds 180 dollars in the international market, Tata will add a proportional sum with the 1.5 dollars per mcf floor price of gas. If fertiliser price falls below 180 dollars, Bangladesh will just get 1.5 dollars per mcf (or \$2 per mcf after 5 years of agreement). The international forecast for fertiliser market says the price will go down to 180 dollars within a few years."

On the other hand, foreign oil companies now produce 33 per cent of the total gas production in Bangladesh. Within two years, when Bibiyana gas field will start operation, the stake of oil companies in gas production will increase to 50 per cent. The oil companies charge nearly \$3 per mcf at well-head. The cost of transmission of that gas to the national grid and to the consumers varies between 75 cents to \$1. As per contract, the oil companies can not sell the gas to any other consumer unless Petrobangla refuses to buy it. Oil companies are also not allowed to sell gas at a price lower than that charged from Petrobangla.

"That the government does not increase gas price for the country's consumers is basically a subsidy. But the government is subsidising its people. There is no reason for the government to subsidise a foreign investor," noted another expert.

On the issue of gas supply security, he said even for ensuring 10 to 14 years' gas supply, Petrobangla will have to reserve or ring-fence several gas fields for Tata and will have to maintain a supply ratio 115 per cent higher than Tata's demand. If the ratio falls short, Petrobangla will have to add other gas fields to the ring-fenced ones. "In one word, Tata will get priority over other consumers."

Another expert suggested, "The government should involve in the decision-making process all the ministries and authorities related to Tata's proposal. None should be left out."

2 killed

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Bhaduria outpost opened fire on Sirajul, 20, and Mostakim, 30, of Dainur village when they were entering the Indian territory at dead of night, killing them on the spot.

The BSF personnel then took away the bodies. Immediately after the incident, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sent a letter to its Indian counterpart demanding return of the bodies.

BSS add: The BSF returned the bodies of two Bangladeshis at a flag meeting held on the zero line of Rangpur border yesterday afternoon.

The BDR personnel later handed over the bodies to Dinajpur Kotwali police.

3,176 doctors

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committee decided to fill these positions on permanent basis, the minister said.

When asked if the doctors will stay in the rural areas, the minister said, "Of course, they will. They will be appointed to serve there."

Although there are posts for nine doctors at an upazila health centre, at present there are four doctors on an average.

The huge vacant posts will be filled up in phases, the minister said, adding that 1,500 doctors are on the process of appointment through the last BCS exam.

The cabinet committee also decided to change the provision of making appointment to the commission rank in the army on a temporary basis. From now on those appointments will be made on permanent basis only.

Shady NGOs

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money within June 4. "If not, we would start tougher movements including fast until death on June 5," the leaders added.

After the rally, the ITCL clients brought out a procession and barricaded the Dhaka-North Bengal highway at Nagar Jalpai area. They dismantled the roadblock when Tangail Superintendent of Police (SP) Mirza Abdullah Baki assured them of sending the message to the prime minister.

The SDS gave 24 per cent interest to people who deposited money there. Clients through the NGO and deposited crores of taka within a very short period. Bangladesh Bank declared its activities and the activities of its mother organisation ITCL illegal and SDS was shut down and all the bank accounts were frozen.

Pro-BNP interns clash

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Afzalur Rashid, Rajib Hossain and two medical students Rahat Hossain and Anwar Shahadat were admitted to the DMCH, while three others received treatments in other clinics.

The clash erupted at about 9:30 in the morning, when Dr Mishu group barred Dr Javed group of the association from sticking up posters at the Doctor's Cafeteria that declared Dr Mamun Shiblee and Mohammad Asaduzzaman as the newly elected president and general secretary of the association for the year 2006-07.

Afzalur Rashid and Aminul Islam Partha, candidates for president and general secretary posts from the Mishu group, protested the putting up of posters saying that the president and the general secretary were not elected legally.

At one point of the heated debate over the issue, Mishu group leaders swooped on the Javed group leaders and stabbed Jahid of Javed group.

On information, Javed group people rushed to Doctor's Cafeteria and attacked those loyal to Mishu group. They also tied Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed Mishu, the leader of the Mishu group, to the grille of the cafeteria and beat him up.

During the clash, the doctors broke the electric bulbs, windows and utensils of the cafeteria, as well as damaged the furniture.

They also snatched a videocassette from the video cameraman of Channel i and ransacked the microbus of Channel 1.

Later, the Vice Principal of the college Professor Syed Mahbubul Alam untied and rescued Mishu, while Brigadier General Sarker MA Matin, director of the DMCH, did not play any role in bringing the situation under control.

Matin also pushed the journalists out of his room and refused to make any comments.

After the clash both the groups held processions and chanted slogans against each other at the

DMCH.

Dr Mishu termed the incident 'pre-planned' and held Dr Javed responsible for it. "The purpose of it was to make the situation of the hospital college chaotic," he noted.

Meanwhile, the newly elected president Dr Mamun Shiblee told The Daily Star that the president and general secretary were elected legally.

Foreign investors

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Dhaka EPZ, reports private TV channel ntv.

The foreign investors would seek the damages through their respective embassies, the report said.

On the other hand, the manufacturers also faced another Tk 40 crore loss, as the factories remained closed due to the violence, according to the Bepza (Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority) officials.

The investors also expressed their concern over the rampage that took place at the DEPZ.

"It is very sad what happened for the last few days. I really do not understand why this disasters happened," said the managing director (MD) of YKK Bangladesh Private Limited. Since these incidents created a very bad image of Bangladesh with the outside world and to the foreign investors, the Bangladesh government should compensate, he added.

A Bepza press release on Wednesday said the outsiders ransacked 27 garment factories of Dhaka EPZ, set ablaze a Korean sweater factory, A-One (BD) Ltd, and damaged several vehicles inside the Dhaka EPZ premises.

US immigration

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Frist, a Tennessee Republican, said the bill was "on a glide path" to passage after the measure passed a key test vote on Wednesday by a strong margin.

A bipartisan coalition pushing the comprehensive bill withstand several attempts by opponents to unravel it. Backers say strong bipartisan approval should strengthen their position in negotiations with the House, which passed a vastly different measure that would further criminalise illegal presence in the United States.

The Senate and House will have to merge their separate bills in a conference before they can send a final measure to President George W. Bush for his signature. It is unclear whether the two chambers will be able to resolve their differences before the November congressional elections.

"If we can get a good vote (Thursday) on final passage, then I think a conference committee represents a good set of possibilities," said Sen. Chuck Hagel, a Nebraska Republican.

Bush, mindful of the growing clout of Hispanic voters, backs a comprehensive approach close to the Senate bill. That measure couples border security and enforcement with a guest worker program and a plan to give some of the 11 million to 12 million illegal immigrants a path to US citizenship.

Rolls show immigration reform is important to Americans, and many Republicans believe that delivering a bill that assuages some of voters' concerns to Bush for his signature could help their sagging poll ratings.

Many lawmakers say Bush will have to become deeply involved in the bargaining for a final bill for it to be done before the November elections, when Democrats hope to make their best showing in more than a decade.

Bush, who has long supported immigration reform, has been trying to address conservative Republicans' concerns about border security. In a nationally televised address this month he said that thousands of National Guard troops would be deployed to secure the leaky border with Mexico.

But that approach was dismissed by many conservatives in the House as inadequate.

UAE

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Khaleda Zia during formal talks in Abu Dhabi, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin told journalists here yesterday.

Terming the prime minister's visit fruitful, he said the oil-rich Gulf country has also agreed to supply oil to Bangladesh at concessional prices. Bangladesh imports 6 lakh metric tons of crude oil from the UAE annually.

On development assistance, the UAE president assured that money from the Abu Dhabi Development Fund could be disbursed for Bangladesh once the projects were identified.

A UAE chamber delegation will be visiting Bangladesh next month or early July to explore the avenues of cooperation, the foreign secretary said. On recruitment of workers, Hemayetuddin said the UAE will recruit more workers from Bangladesh for construction work.

He said the prime minister had also fruitful discussion with UAE Chamber of Commerce and Industry leader Salah Salem bin Omerial Shamsi, also the president of Gulf Chamber of Investment in Bangladesh.

"I believe the prime minister's visit has cast a very positive impact on the UAE government and the people," the foreign secretary said.

Nepal frees Maoists

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But support for retaining Hinduism as a state religion in Nepal, where the king is revered by some as the deity Vishnu, remains strong.

A strike called by religious activists in the south Thursday to protest the government's decision to end Nepal's status as the world's last Hindu kingdom crippled normal life, police said.

"All the shops, businesses and educational institutions closed their shutters and the highways were deserted in Birgunj," the town's police chief Bir Bahadur Rana told AFP.

"The activists have called for a general strike today and have begun obstructing the traffic by burning tyres. Police have been mobilized around the city to thwart any kind of violence," said Rana.

Demonstrators descended on Birgunj, 275 km south of Kathmandu, from the capital and neighbouring India, police said.

On Wednesday protesters blocked roads with burning tyres, closed shops and ransacked a newspaper van before torching its contents because it backed the new government's proclamation of a secular state.

A smaller protest was held in Kathmandu where 100 people, including Hindu holy men, were

stopped by police near parliament but blocked the road and demanded the government reverse their decision.

Gita Prasai, a housewife and one of the demonstrators, said: "Hinduism has not been a problem for others to practise their religions, so Nepal must be a Hindu kingdom."

The government has continued to move fast on a 12-point program agreed with the rebels to force an end to King Gyanendra's absolute power after he sacked the government in February 2005.

The two sides have agreed a ceasefire and the government has promised to investigate rights and other abuses during the king's 14-month rule.

The Maoists have also demanded to know the fate of 569 "disappeared" from their