

City bursts into violence to protest power cuts

Desco offices vandalised; Rab vehicle torched; 100 injured as protesters clash with law enforcers across country; Desa seeks special security

STAR REPORT

Thousands of people infuriated by severe power crisis set fire to power distribution offices in some parts of the capital, including the Desco headquarters at Mirpur, and elsewhere in the country, and staged demonstrations yesterday.

Pitched battles between the demonstrators and police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) left around 100 injured across the country.

The demonstrators burnt and vandalised vehicles on the streets in the capital, including a Rab pick-up van at Keraniganj, and window

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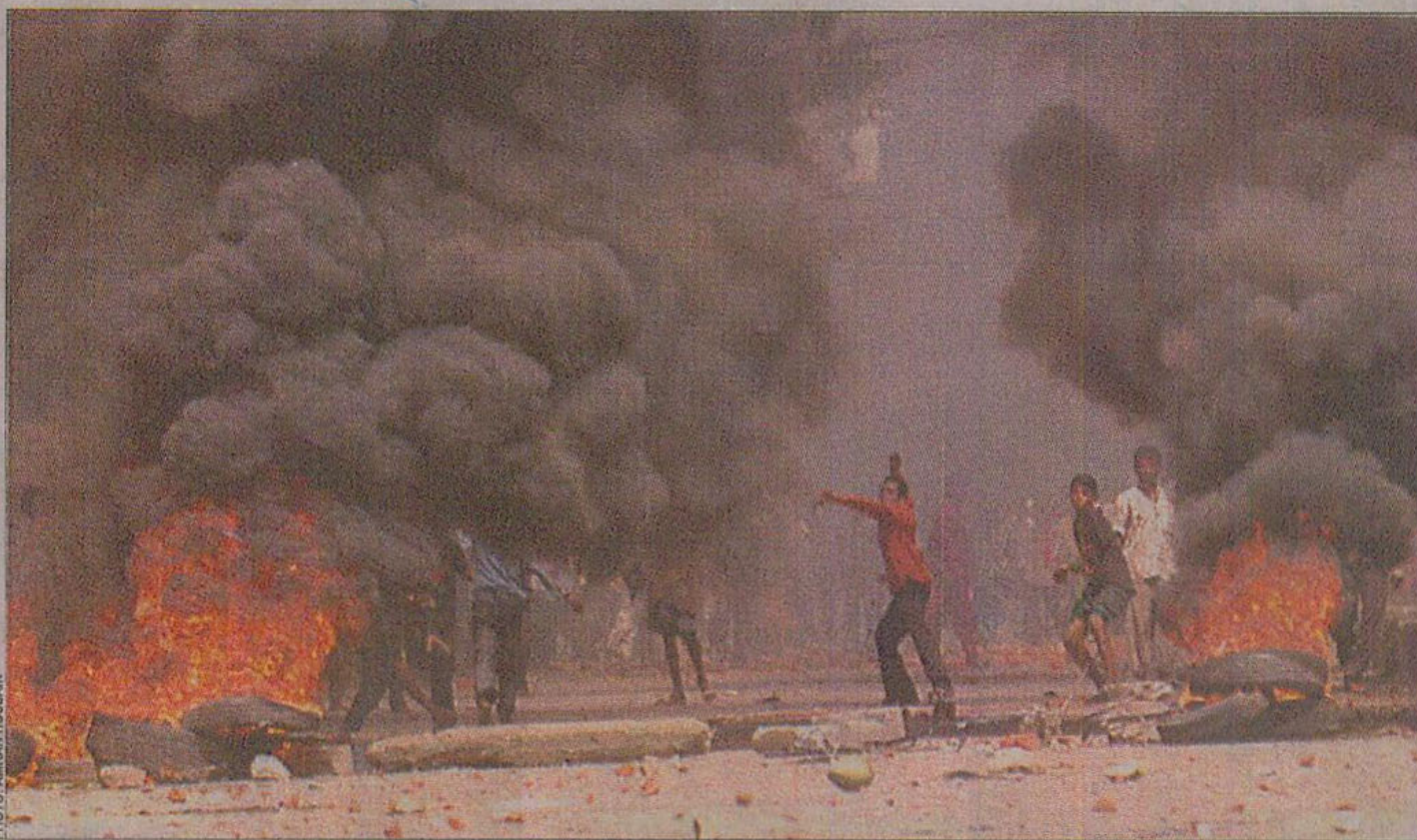
3 units collapse spelling darkness in north

UNB, Strajganj

Three power units with a total capacity of 171 megawatts at Baghabari river-port station collapsed suddenly last night, throwing 16 northern districts into darkness.

The collapse of the power stations—a 100-MW one of Power

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Electricity-starved people burn tyres and throw brickbats at law enforcers at Mirpur-10 intersection in the capital yesterday blocking the road for hours. (More pictures on page 2 & 20)

REFORM

AL ready to compromise, not on Hasan, Aziz

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

In the event of talks, the opposition might compromise on some of its reform proposals but not on its objections to Justice KM Hasan as the caretaker government chief and MA Aziz as the chief election commissioner (CEC).

"We might consider compromising on some proposals for electoral reforms. But we will never allow Justice KM Hasan to be the chief adviser and Justice MA Aziz to continue as the CEC, and at the

same time, the other election commissioners too will have to be changed," Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star at his Mercantile Bank office yesterday.

Any dialogue with the ruling BNP must seek to fix who other than Justice Hasan and Justice Aziz will be the chief adviser to the caretaker government and the CEC, Jalil, also coordinator of the 14-party combine, said.

BNP has yet to give the main opposition AL any formal proposal for talks. LGRD and Cooperatives

Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was supposed to call his counterpart Jalil on Wednesday night, but the AL general secretary told The Daily Star at 10:00pm that he did not yet get the phone call.

"They [Bhuiyan and his colleagues] are certainly discussing in the party forum how many of our proposals for reforms should they accept at the negotiating table," he said adding that may be that is why Bhuiyan has been

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Durga Puja begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hindu devotees are all set to invoke goddess Durga, daughter of the majestic Himalayas, with the Mahasaptami puja at some 19,000 puja mandaps across the country today.

Mahasaptami, an important day of Durga Puja, celebrates the goddess's victory over Mahishashur, the demon, symbolising the victory of good over evil. Devotees recite hymns and offer flowers on this day seeking blessings of Durgatashini Durga, the saviour from all evils.

Following the lunar schedule, Mahasaptami puja will have to begin within 8:22am today.

Devotees attended the mandaps yesterday to receive

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Chaotic scenario in power sector

20 plants with 1,500 MW capacity remain shut

SHARIEF KHAN

A chaotic scenario prevails in the country's power generation sector as 20 power units have remained shut and the Power Development Board (PDB) can't say exactly when eight of these could resume operation.

These units with about 1,500 MW power generation capacity have been shut down either for maintenance or technical glitches. Meanwhile, a 2,000 MW plus load-shedding level has sparked mass

protests in different areas of the country.

In one instance of lack of coordination, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has blocked release of some imported maintenance equipment for Meghnaghat 450 MW power plant for the last five or six days in connection with tax payment.

The plant, which had undergone a pre-scheduled maintenance earlier this month and is producing half its capacity now,

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Bangla Bhai ready to appeal today

Khaled Saifullah files application for appeal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite repeated refusals to accept the 'worldly courts' during trial, yet another top militant yesterday filed an application seeking permission to appeal in the Supreme Court while Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai will file a similar petition today.

"On receiving a jail appeal from Khaled Saifullah, we have sent a letter to the home ministry and its copies to the jail authorities asking to stay execution of his death sentence," Fazlul Karim, registrar of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star.

While Rafiqul Islam, elder brother of militant kingpin Bangla Bhai, yesterday submitted necessary papers to the sub-jail authorities in Mirpur for filing the application for a leave to appeal.

The authorities will forward the papers to the Supreme Court

today after taking Bangla Bhai's signature, Rafiqul said.

Bangla Bhai has already consented to filing an appeal against the death sentence, he quoted the jail authorities as saying.

Khaled Saifullah, a Majlish-e-Shura (the highest policymaking body) member of banned Jama atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), submitted the appeal through the authorities of Rangpur jail.

"The regular appeal has been filed by his (Khaled Saifullah) lawyer," Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Helal Uddin Mollah told The Daily Star.

Helal, quoting from the jail appeal petition of Khaled Saifullah, said the three-page petition referred to the militant's demand in the lower court in Jhalakathias

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\$211M DEAL SIGNED

Powerful lobby bringing Chinese firms for digital phone exchange

STAR REPORT

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) yesterday signed a massive 211-million-dollar "buyer's credit" agreement with China for a digital telecom exchange project under Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTBB).

Sources said the "buyer's credit" is nothing but a supplier's credit—a mode of financing restricted in the government policy and discouraged by the World Bank. According to economists, up to 40 per cent of such opaque credit goes to individuals' pockets.

A top political lobby close to the prime minister's family has been pushing the deal that seeks to limit procurement of digital telecom exchange equipment exclusively within Chinese companies.

A source pointed out that this idea was designed to ensure that the deal goes to a certain Chinese

company. The local representative of that company has made an arrangement with the members of a top political family of the country in which the representative will pay the lobby 10 per cent of the total project cost as commission, the source claimed. "This is one of the last big deals of this political lobby ahead of the elections," he added.

The Cabinet Division on January 22 cleared a proposal to seek this loan from China for the project. The ERD signed the agreement yesterday as a follow-up.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has been resisting this project titled Setting up Digital Telephone Exchange in the metropolitan cities, important towns and upazila growth centres since 2003 when the project exclusively tailored for China-based procurement was first conceived.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

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NEW

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