

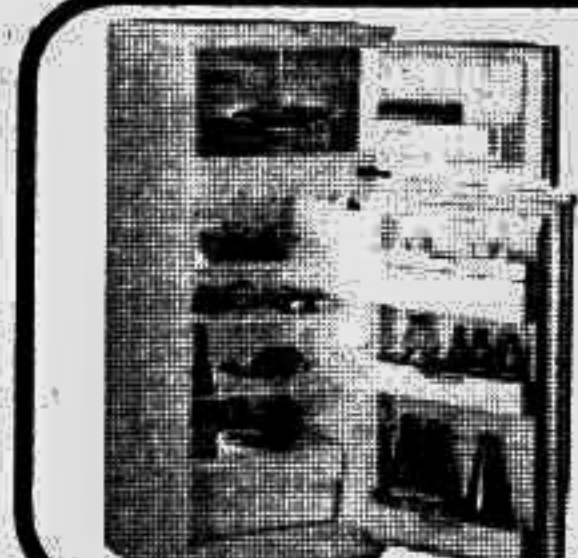


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No plan to export gas, JS told

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Prof Rafiqul Islam told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that the government has no plan to export gas before fulfilling the country's internal demand, reports UNB.

He said the government's prime concern is to fulfil the internal demand, not export.

"We will not export gas until the internal demand is met," the State Minister assured a BNP MP who expressed concern over the government plan to export gas.

Replying to Mojibur Rahman Sarwar (BNP-Barisal), he further said that under the new model of production sharing contract (PSC), 12 foreign companies have made 37 proposals for 16 blocks.

Rafiqul Islam said the northern part of the country would get gas through pipeline from the Bangabandhu Bridge from April this year.

The gas through pipeline would first reach Bangabari and then other northern parts of the country in phases, he said.

Power crisis

Rafiqul Islam also assured the lawmakers that electricity crisis would be over by the next fiscal year.

The country was facing the problem because of the shortage in power generation, he acknowledged replying to a sup-

plementary from Dr Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin (BNP-Dhaka) during question hour in Parliament.

Replying to Sarwar Jamal Nizam (BNP-Chittagong), the state minister said that the government has taken steps to set up new power plants and increase the generation capacity of existing plants.

"We are doing our utmost to end the present power crisis," he said.

Prof Rafiq said that among the four planned barge-mounted power plants, one has already been commissioned for commercial operation.

"The remaining three barge-mounted plants will be commissioned by May 1999," he added.

He told the House that the rehabilitation work of the old plants is going on in full swing. "After rehabilitation, the old plants will have an expanded capacity of at least 110 MW."

The state minister said 60 MW Shahjibazar, 210 MW Siddhirganj and 109 MW Haripur Combined Cycle power plants will be commissioned by the year 2001, 2002 and 2001 respectively.

Meanwhile, a number of plans have been taken up to set up private power plants. These include 60 MW Mymensingh power plant, 360 MW Haripur Combined Cycle power plant and 450 MW Meghnaghat thermal power plant.

Lakhs of devotees seek

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Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia offered her *munajat* staying in a room of nearby Ashraf Textile Mill.

Moulana Saad during *munajat* in Urdu and Arabic language sought help from the Almighty Allah in preaching Islam throughout the world.

He also urged for strengthening the command of Allah and Prophet among the Muslim *Ummah*.

A large number of women and children also took part in the *munajat* sitting on the rooftops of nearby houses and high-rise buildings.

Movement of all kinds of motorised vehicles from Airport to Joydevpur Square remained stalled as thousands of people rushed toward the *Ijtima* ground on foot. The movement of vehicles resumed after the conclusion of the *munajat*.

The devotees also faced tremendous difficulties in returning home as all modes of transports were packed. They had to struggle hard for getting a place in the buses, mini-buses and trains.

Bangladesh Railway operated a number of special trains between Dhaka and Tongi for transporting the *Ijtima* devotees.

Rickshaw

From Page 1

rented since the Eid holidays.

"Most of my drivers are from Rangpur and Barisal and the Eid holidays have been asking me to reduce the rent otherwise they said they would go back to village to work in the paddy field," Mujibor said.

Every rickshawpuller pays a daily rent of between Tk 40 and 70 to the owner of the rickshaw. The amount depends on the condition of the vehicle.

Another garage owner nearby however said many rickshaw owners were reluctant to rent their rickshaws out because the police have started to crack down on illegal rickshaws.

Bid to implement govt's blueprint thru' CEC: BNP

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday alleged that the government Commissioner were pushing the country towards a chaotic situation centering the "unilateral and farcical" municipal polls.

Side by side, he alleged, the government has intensified repression on opposition leaders and activists as it has become afraid of a mass movement.

"The government has adopted the path of killing, arrest, filing of false cases and harassing opposition men with an ill motive to hold the municipal elections," Bhuiyan said in a statement.

The BNP secretary general alleged that the government was trying to implement its "blue print" through the CEC and warned, "Both Sheikh Hasina and Abu Hena will have to bear the entire responsibilities for the consequences".

Bail prayer of ATV director rejected

By Staff Correspondent

Sohel Chowdhury, one of the directors of private satellite channel ATV, arrested on January 25, was produced before the CMM's court yesterday.

Sohel was arrested in a case lodged with Mujibhel thana on January 13. Information ministry sought legal action against the owners of the channel including Aziz Mohammad Bhal, under Section 25 (khal) (i) of the Special Powers Act 1974.

Tauhidul Bulbul, a senior assistant secretary of the ministry in the FIR alleged that the owners of ATV along with their associates were involved in smuggling video tapes of different films and programmes.

Police produced Soheli before CMM's court yesterday on expiry of five-day remand. Police, however, did not pray for fresh remand yesterday.

A bail petition was moved on behalf of Soheli. The court, however, rejected the petition and sent him to Dhaka Central Jail.

BRTA stickers for vehicles from Feb 4

By Special Correspondent

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) yesterday said coloured tax, fitness and route permit stickers for motor vehicles will be introduced on February 4.

The vehicle owners will have to collect the stickers during renewal of their tax token, fitness certificate and route permit on payment of Tk 40 for each sticker. The red-coloured tax label would be available at post offices. The blue-coloured fitness label and green-coloured permit label would be available at the BRTA office.

The stickers should be displayed on the left side of the windshield with tax followed by fitness and permit from the top. However, motorcycles will not need to display the labels.

The vehicle owners, whose tax, fitness and route permits would expire from February 4 onwards, will have to collect the stickers while renewing the permits, said a press release of the BRTA.



Asma Begum with her mother at the dialysis unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital. — Star photo by Sk Enamul Haq

Asma undergoes kidney transplantation today

By Staff Correspondent

"Zahura Begum is also fit for donating kidney for her daughter," Prof Rashid added.

Asma's kidney transplantation would cost over Tk two lakh. She will require post surgery application of cyclosporine drug that helps prevent rejection of kidney for at least three months.

So far the government has not yet taken any action against the doctors who allegedly removed the only functioning kidney of Asma Begum while operating for removal of an 'ovarian tumour' at the DMCH gynaecology operation

theatre on August 11 last year. The health ministry later formed a three-member committee to investigate the incident but the findings were never made public.

According to a senior official of the health ministry, "The probe committee report cannot be divulged as long as the case remains with the court."

The DMCH director also declined to disclose about the probe body report saying, "I cannot talk to the press regarding Asma's case as the issue is under lawsuit."

Mashur Rahman of BNP said that Abu Sayeed showed the Eid moon at the 10 o'clock bulletin of BTB. But the Chair corrected him that it was the news of moon-sighting, not the moon itself.

Mashur also asked Abu Sayeed if the BTB would stop excessive coverage of the "begum-golams" (meaning the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues) in the news.

Bore the minister could reply, the Deputy Speaker asked whether there had been any such practice during the past regime.

"It has now increased 10 times," shouted Abdul Wahab of BNP.

An apparently embarrassed Abu Sayeed responded, "It's not a question to be answered." But later he claimed that the BTB coverage of the present prime minister was much less than that of her predecessor, Khaleda Zia.

The Deputy Speaker pronounced 'Sircar' while allowing the floor to BNP lawmaker Jamiruddin Sircar. But another BNP MP, Joyal Abedin Faruk, told the Chair, "He is Sarkar, not Sircar."

"Is it so?" wondered the Chair.

"No, no, I'm Sircar," protested Jamiruddin Sircar and spelled the word.

"Then, I was correct and you party colleague misgued me," said a relieved Deputy Speaker.

At this stage, Jamiruddin cited the example of P.C. Sircar, the world famous magician.

The Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Education, M Nurul Islam Nahid, presented the reports on the Dhaka University (Amendment) Bill, 1998 and the Chittagong University (Amendment) Bill, 1998 before the House last night, reports BSS.

The reports contained note of dissents from Alamgir Kabir and Moshir Rahman, both from BNP. The BNP members suggested to specify the number of pro-vice chancellors for the universities instead of the words 'more than one.'



Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, left, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot greet members of the press yesterday in New Delhi. India will sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in exchange for the unfreezing of international lending, senior US and Indian officials said yesterday. (Story on page-9). —AP/UNB photo

JS snippets

By Nazmul Ashraf

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday played host to some lively remarks about vulgar film posters.

"It's difficult to understand from the posters and banners displayed at some cinema halls if the actresses are at all wearing something. It's a matter of great embarrassment for us when we come across these posters accompanied by our family members especially women," Awami League lawmaker Hajj Mohammad Selim said.

Selim then wanted to know from state minister for information Prof Abu Sayeed if any step would be taken to stop publication of such posters. As another AL MP Mirza Azam raised the same question, Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid said smilingly, "Why do you look at those posters?"

Abu Sayeed admitted that such posters were on display at cinema halls and other public places. He said only the decent posters get the nod but a section of unscrupulous businessmen in the film industry circulate tempered posters. He added posters of two films -- *Ammajan* and *Ranga Bou* -- have been banned for vulgarity.

Several BNP lawmakers ridiculed the government for the delayed announcement of giving the floor to ask a question to the state minister for information, Shahidul Islam said, "The minister is very efficient as he could succeed in broadcasting the news of moon-sighting through BTB at 10 pm (January 18)."

"It's not his affair but the religion ministers," pointed out the Deputy Speaker.

"But it was his (Prof Sayeed) TV that dashed out the news," said Shahidul.

Mashur Rahman of BNP said that Abu Sayeed showed the Eid moon at the 10 o'clock bulletin of BTB. But the Chair corrected him that it was the news of moon-sighting, not the moon itself.

Mashur also asked Abu Sayeed if the BTB would stop excessive coverage of the "begum-golams" (meaning the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues) in the news.

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JP: War of words

From Page 1

politics coming out from army barracks were "mainly responsible for the political wilderness and bankruptcy blocking the way for healthy politics".

"Such politicians often warn opposition parties of public wrath. This is ridiculous. They can not realise what the public wrath really is as they were hurriedly taken to safe custody after being ousted from power. Law could not take its due course against them for different reasons," Mizan Chowdhury had said.

Chowdhury's statement evoked sharp reaction. Three JP Presidium members -- ABM Shahjahan, Kazi Firoz Rashid and Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar -- in a joint statement on Saturday said it was a serious violation of party constitution

and demanded his expulsion from the party.

They also said the statement was aimed at foiling the opposition movement. Mizan Chowdhury had split Awami League to make his own fortune. He was all praise for Ershad for one and a half decades only for position in the party. Now he (Mizan) is criticising him (Ershad). This is an ill-effort to foil the oppositions movement," they said.

Countering this, seven mid-ranking leaders of the JP in a statement on Sunday said the three Presidium members were "conspirators" and alleged that they were trying to split the party by misleading the Chairman and adopting various strategies.

They also brought out the allegations against the three presidium members. They alleged that ABM Shahjahan was instrumental in the killing of "an unspecified number of people" in the name of Gano Bahini. He took a huge amount of money from the party during 1991 elections but lost his security seats he contested. He is skilled in the politics of splitting parties. He split the JSD and is now trying to split the JP, they alleged.

Kazi Firoz Rashid had met Ershad in jail as a special envoy of Khaleda Zia to persuade the JP chief to participate in the "farcical" election in February 15, 1996, the seven JP leaders alleged. Firoz got nominations to contest from Gopalganj and Dhaka but he "sold out the two seats to Awami League for money," they alleged. "He has no business now except splitting the party," they alleged.

The seven leaders claimed that Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar's only desire is to return to Awami League through Dr Malek. "What can he do when Sheikh Hasina rejected his proposal to return to AL?"

They urged party Chairman HM Ershad to remain alert about the vested quarters and protect the party from conspirators.

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