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Both parties willing to talk transshipment in parliament

But they have different purposes in mind

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim

Both the treasury bench and opposition are willing to discuss the contentious move for land transshipment privilege to India in the approaching session of the Jatiya Sangsad beginning August 29.

The main opposition BNP is eager to cross words on the floor of the House castigating the cabinet's consent to explore the concept of transshipment by experts.

"We're ready to discuss the transshipment issue in the coming session of parliament. The JS Business Advisory Committee will decide the modality of the planned discussion," senior AL leader and Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star.

A relaxed Razzak went on to say, "We don't find any problem in holding an open discussion on the transshipment idea, which the cabinet has approved in principle for it to be examined at the expert level. We'll

produce in the House the documents to justify our position. Besides, the BNP in power first signed the transit accord with India in 1980 and no successive government felt it to be detrimental to our national interest."

Asked if the government will incorporate elements of the opposition viewpoint emanating from the discussion, the minister said they were just working on an idea. "Our next steps will be guided by the experts authorised to work out the modality and technicality. We'll also take into consideration the outcome of the planned discussion in parliament."

Chief whip of the opposition and a senior BNP leader Khondaker Iswar Hossain told this paper, "We'll demand a general discussion in parliament on the transshipment issue. We would like a detailed discussion on all aspects of the issue. We'll try to

project the Awami League government's anti-national character through the debate." But Hossain snared that the Treasury Bench may propose a thanks-giving motion, ignoring Opposition demands for a general discussion on the risky matter. "A parliamentary debate will be meaningless without a general discussion."

The opposition chief whip said his party would resolutely oppose the current government move to grant India the facility, which he suspected would be used as a corridor.

He blamed the AL government for deciding "unilaterally" on all issues of national importance skirting lawmakers. "Had the issue been so urgent, a designated session of parliament could have been called before cabinet endorsement."

Sources in BNP said the party was divided about their part in parliament. Certain governing factor fawn joining

in the parliamentary debate while others contemplate the assembly should chorus diversely till the government overrules its decision.

BNP chief and leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia in the interim listened to her senior colleagues and legal experts' ever since the cabinet sanctioned the transshipment idea on July 28. She is also generating public opinion solidly disputing the government motion.

A rendezvous of the BNP parliamentary party (BNP) will sanction or approve the party's tactics for the impending dispute, opposition chief whip said.

Similarly, Minister Abdur Razzak said, "The AL parliamentary party will likewise appropriate shortly to determine on a party approach to stand the opposition in parliament on consignment and other topics."



Simultaneous times
Demonstrating slum dwellers lay siege to Agargaon road in the city yesterday (top), and two infants sleep on the debris of a shanty at a slum at Tejgaon, which was demolished Wednesday, while their mother is out to get some food. — Star photo: Sk Enamul Huq

Court orders no-eviction till Aug 19

By SC Correspondent

The High Court by extending its earlier order yesterday directed the government and other authorities concerned not to demolish any slum in the city till August 19.

Earlier on Wednesday, the HC stayed demolition of the slum till hearing of the substantive writ petition at 10:30 am yesterday.

Upon a verbal prayer from the government yesterday, the HC adjourned hearing of the petition till August 17.

Attorney General Mahmudul Islam yesterday strongly opposed the writ petition and sought time to present relevant documents and the government position in this regard.

Ain-o-Salish Kendra, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Odhiker and two slum dwellers named Ismat Ara Dipu and Rahima filed the writ.

It challenged the legality and authority of demolition of slums in the city and eviction of the inhabitants of those by the government. Dhaka City Corporation and RAJUK without arranging any alternative accommodation facilities and without any prior notice.

The petition has been filed against the government represented by the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and the Secretary, Ministry of Works, Dhaka City Corporation, RAJUK, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Deputy Commissioner and Metropolitan Police Commissioner of Dhaka impugning them as respondents.

A Division Bench of the HC comprising Justice KM Hasan and Justice MA Qudus passed the order yesterday.

Dr Kamal Hossain moved for the petitioners. Attorney General Mahmudul Islam along with Additional Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, represented the government.

Inter-ministerial failure to firm up power projects

An interministerial meeting on power sector development in the city yesterday again failed to finalise the projects needed to improve power situation, reports UNB.

"However, it was a fruitful meeting. At least we went one step forward. The projects will be finalised soon and would go for ECNEC approval," said a high official of a power-related body.

According to sources, the Energy Ministry put pressure on the Finance Ministry to agree on the much needed reform and rehabilitation projects and mobilise funds as soon as possible to avert further crisis.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Professor Rafiqul Islam

were present at the meeting at the finance ministry. The energy ministry is yet to start its urgent development programme in the sector because of shortage of funds for which it has been trying for last 3-4 months.

The ministry had earlier requested for Tk 500 crore to modernise and rehabilitate its outdated generations plants to recover at least 350 MW electricity from the existing plants.

The funds are yet to be released by the finance ministry. In March this year, when the power crisis became acute, the energy ministry decided to install GOB funded new power generation plants capable of producing 350 MW to 500 MW to meet the demand. The State Minister for Energy met the Prime Minister who is in

charge of the ministry to get her approval for the programme.

As per decision of the meeting, the energy ministry asked for tenders from interested parties capable of installing the plants within six months. About 15 power companies applied to get the jobs to install new plants.

According to sources, although the Prime Minister approved the programme, the finance ministry differed with the plan and floated a new idea of modernising the old plants to recover at least 350 MW to 500 MW.

The meeting accepted the new idea and asked the Finance Ministry and Economic Relations Department to organise fund for rehabilitating the older plants. It also included

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Tragic splendour
Bengali poets have heralded the monsoon the king of seasons. The incessant rain is back again enlivening all forms of life. Star photographer AKM Mohsin photographed the aquatic lotus blossom. The aquatic flower also happens to be the nation's national flower.

Bangladeshis in dire straights

Those who fled detention centre in Malaysia are yet to be traced

By Reaz Ahmad

The government is yet to determine the fate of an unspecified number of Bangladeshis who fled a detention centre in Malaysia late last month.

The Bangladeshis who were among 192 foreign workers could no longer bear unhygienic condition in the detention camp where at least one Indonesian died of respiratory problem, reports from

Malaysia said.

On July 27, some 689 out of 1,025 detainees at the Lenggang Detention Centre demonstrated against rationing of water for three days and health problems. One detainee died while many others complained of respiratory complications at the camp. During the demonstration about 192 of the detainees escaped from the camp.

New Straits Times reported last month that 192 detainees escaped the camp putting wire fencing at the back of the camp and fled to nearby jungle when some 689 inmates had gathered outside the camp.

in defiance of the security personnel to protest water rationing.

The escapees comprised Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians, Myanmar and Indonesians. See page 11 Col 5

Maize can be amazing

Policy support, private sector response needed

By Reaz Ahmad

Pricing, marketing and preservation constraints are the key factors holding back Bangladesh from growing enough maize, say experts.

They feel that the country can see its maize export dream come true provided the growers get government policy support and there is greater response from the private sector.

An earlier World Bank study saw bright prospect of increasing maize production both for the domestic market as well as for export. Malaysia is a potential market for maize export and Bangladesh can explore it. The phenomenal increase in maize acreage during the recent years made experts optimistic to suggest that Bangladesh can not only save on imports for maize but can sell it to neighboring countries including India and Myanmar.

The maize area has increased from a mere 3,600 hectares in 1991-92 to 15,000 hectares now.

At present, local maize production is only 60,000 to 80,000 metric tons (MTs) while potential demand for maize is estimated to be 270,000 MTs. The deficit is met by imports from neighboring India and Myanmar.

According to Bangladesh Poultry Industries' Association, local maize production is

80,000 MT while 10,000 MT more is being imported to feed the local poultry industries. Of an estimated 350,000 MT of potential poultry feed requirement, maize contributes one lakh Mats while the rest is made up of wheat.

Dr S K Vasal, a Regional Maize Breeder of CIMMYT, the Mexico-based world body of wheat and maize research, on a weeklong visit to Bangladesh recently had a close look at the country's prospect of enhancing maize production. Dr Vasal along with Dr Craig A Meisner, Bangladesh mission chief of CIMMYT had detailed talks with all stakeholders.

Later, Dr Vasal pointed out, "To popularize hybrid maize and cover more area, maize will need to compete with wheat and Boro rice. Relative pricing of the three commodities will be a determining factor in the relative preference of one commodity over another. Local production cost and the world price of maize may also be an important consideration."

Introduction of hybrid has been to a large extent responsible for such phenomenal growth in maize acreage. Efforts of NGOs in conducting and successfully demonstrating increased yield potential of maize hybrids through various production technologies was also

instrumental. Growers use hybrid to meet 75 per cent of their total seed requirement. Hybrid seed requirement is close to 350 tons, half of which is being locally produced by BRAC, Gramen Krishi Foundation and Kushiya Seed Store.

According to the FAO, maize production largely depends on its linkage with poultry producers. For instance, BRAC produces maize for its poultry farms. But it is gathered from the ministry concerned that due to low price offered by NGOs, government had to go for maize procurement for the first time last year to support the price.

This year too, government is buying 10,000 MTs of locally produced maize at Tk. 7 per kilogram.

Meanwhile, USAID has recently agreed to cooperate in promotion, production and research of maize if CIMMYT comes up with a specific proposal.

As per expert calculation, domestic maize production will be distributed under a number of heads. The ratios in future will be — human consumption: 42 percent; poultry feed: 26 percent; cattle fodder: 22 percent; and starch industry: 10 percent. Use of maize for poultry feed alone is growing at the rate of 10 to 15 per cent annually.

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