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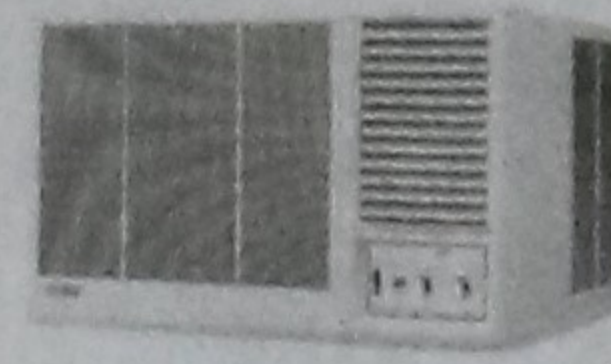
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Elderly people carrying placards and banners took out a procession in the city yesterday to mark the International Day for Older Persons. The procession was organised by Resource Integration Centre (RIC). -- Star photo

Workshop on power sector told in city Reforms without independent regulatory body meaningless

By Special Correspondent

Reforming the power sector without a strong and independent regulatory body would be meaningless as it would not attract the investors or cut system loss to improve service to the consumers, speakers told a Workshop on Bangladesh Power Sector Reform in the city yesterday.

They emphasised that such a regulatory body would help maximise investment in energy sector, create competition and ensure fair price to consumers. The three-day workshop began at Sonargaon hotel on Saturday. It has been jointly organised by Bangladesh Government and World Bank with Energy Sector Management Programme, New Zealand Trade Development Corporation, United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank Institute.

Those who spoke yesterday included Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of US Department of Energy Calvin Humphrey, who set the tone of the workshop on the day. Besides, experts from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Chile presented reports on their respective countries' reforms in power sector with regulatory bodies playing a pivotal role.

Humphrey said, "It is extremely important to get investment in new electricity supply so that more Bangladeshis can enjoy the advantage of electricity in their everyday life and power is there for industry to boost economic growth. To get this investment, the market must offer a fair and attractive rate of return on the funds invested; otherwise, investors will go elsewhere."

Competition among electricity generators is the key to keep power rate affordable to consumers and retain competitive edge of export products in world market, he said. "To have this competition, there must be non-discriminatory access to the power grid and there must be adequate capacity of the grid for generators to enter."

Humphrey cited Rural Electrification Board and its stake holders in Palli Biddyt Samities as a model of successful independent cooperatives effectively managing power distribution.

He discussed various aspects of US-Bangladesh energy partnership, including USAID's South Asian Regional Initiative (SARI) under which USAID will provide 30 million dollars over the next 10 years for training and technical assistance in the energy and power sectors. "SARI also aims to promote cross-border cooperation in energy and mobilising private capital for investments in the energy and power sectors," he said.

Humphrey noted, "Bangladesh has a tremendous opportunity as it develops its energy resources to learn from the experiences of other countries both what they have done right and what they have done wrong. Among these experiences of other countries, Bangladesh has an opportunity to learn from American deregulation efforts in power distribution. As I have related to you today, the US is doing much and is prepared to do much more to share American expertise in the energy sector to assist Bangladesh making informed decisions about the best paths to pursue energy and power development in your country. But we recognise that final decisions must be made by Bangladeshis with a goal of accelerating the rate of economic growth and bring higher living standards for your people."

The workshop also heard Charles J. Cicchetti of the University of Southern California, US; M Y Rao, former Chairman and MD of Orissa State Electricity Board and GRIDCO, India; Dr Ismail Bin Mustapha, Head of Strategic Management and Coordination, TNB, Malaysia; Renato Agurto Colima of Synex Engineering Consultants of Santiago, Chile; Dr Govind Saha, MD of Cap Gemini Ernst & Young NZ Ltd., New Zealand; Allan Asher, deputy chairman of Australian Competition and Consumer Commission; Amir Shalaby, Manager of Regulatory Affairs, Ontario Independent Market Operator, Canada.

They narrated their experiences on deregulation of electricity sector, setting up of independent regulatory bodies and commissions which also ensured consumers' and investors' rights, pricing and check on monopoly. The three sessions of the workshop on the day were chaired by Dr Shah Mohammad Farid, Member of Planning Commission; Mokammel Huq, Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment and Dr Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Secretary, Planning.

The government is examining release of some under-trial prisoners detained for three years whose maximum punishment, if convicted, would not exceed three years, sources in the Home ministry said yesterday.

The idea behind this is to reduce over crowding in prisons. The number of such under-trial prisoners who could be released under the plan would be at least 9000, the sources said seeking anonymity.

There are about 61,000 prisoners in different jails in the country, of whom, around 46,000 are under trial. The jail authorities have been asked to categorise the under-trial prisoners along with types of their crimes.

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Call to implement accord 'Garment factories violating labour laws, human rights'

By Staff Correspondent

The National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF) called upon garment factory owners yesterday to implement the agreement signed between Bangladesh Garments Workers Union (BGWU) and the BGMEA on September 10 regarding weekly holiday, maternity leave, identity card and other relevant demands.

The garment factories are violating the labour laws and human rights by forcing the workers to work in night and on weekly holidays, they said and urged the workers not to work on holidays in line with the agreement that comes into force from the first week of this month.

Many garment factory owners force workers to work on weekly holidays by violating labour law and do not even pay their salaries and allowances, alleged Amirul Huq, General Secretary of NGWF at a press conference organised at its office at Topkhana in the city.

He said garment factories earn million of dollars every year but are reluctant to spend a penny for the workers who are breaking their back.

However, it has announced programmes to press their demands fearing that many garment factories won't imple-

ment the agreement. The programme includes holding of meetings at the gates of different garment factories from today and observance of Weekly Holiday Campaign Day on October 6.

The NGWF will submit a memorandum to the Chief Inspector of Mills while garment factory worker will observe October 13 as a protest day and will hold rallies to announce next course of action.

Amin alleged that most garment factories did not let their workers take weekly off; moreover, owners make them work in a 12 to 16 hours working shift without giving any overtime. Thousands of garment factory workers have fallen sick due to absence of proper working condition in garment factories.

They also called upon all concerned including all progressive political parties of the country, trade unions, human rights organisations and women rights organisation to raise their voice in this regard.

Alan Kabir, President of NGWF, Sahida Sarkar, Alamgir Sikdar, Parul Begum, Wahiduzzaman, Lovely Biswas and Safia Parvin attended the press conference among others.

BNP leader's abduction

CID seeks adequate police to raid jungle in Ramgati

LUXMIPUR, Oct 1: CID police investigating the abduction of Advocate Nurul Islam, today asked for adequate police force to raid the jungle of Bayarchar in Ramgati upazila, reports UNB.

Informed sources said abductors were hiding in Bayarchar Jungle where the accused of Chittagong 8-murder staying with firearms.

Advocate Islam, BNP district Organising Secretary, was abducted from his relative's house in the town on the night of September 18. The administration believed that he had been killed the following day.

A senior police official said the possibility of abductors hiding in Bayarchar could not be ruled out. Armed terrorists living there were reportedly looted valuables from boats and travelers in river Meghna. Bayarchar is also known as a safe den of smugglers.

He said it needed a strong police force with heavy arms to launch drive against terrorists in Bayarchar, where local police did not dare to go.

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The visiting China Heilongjiang Art Troupe performing at the opening show of a three-day cultural programme organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy at National Museum Auditorium yesterday.

-- Star photo



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held a meeting with the leaders of Sylhet district Awami League at Ganohaban yesterday. The meeting was called to end internal feud in the district unit. -- PID photo

New administrative city with Sectt, govt offices & ministers' qtrs PM reveals plan on World Habitat Day

By Staff Correspondent

The government has a plan to build a new Dhaka Administrative City to house the Secretariat, government offices and ministers' quarters on 168 acres of land along the Eastern Bypass Road to ease congestion in the capital.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina disclosed this while inaugurating a programme marking the World Habitat Day today at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

"Relocation of the administrative offices including the Secretariat and official residences of the ministers has become essential to solve the acute problem of congestion in the capital city," she told the function, organised by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

While mulling over the idea, the government is sharing experiences with various other international cities for a modern and planned Dhaka city.

The prime minister further said that a plan is underway to remove slum dwellers from government and semi-government

lands and rehabilitate them with all civic facilities at places around the capital.

Noting that weak rural economy, scarcity of job opportunities, river erosion and social deprivation in villages are forcing people to migrate to cities, she told the function that her government is taking appropriate measures to stop such migration.

The prime minister also spoke about the rapid growth of slums in the city and blamed the previous governments for their negligence and indifference to the plights of slum dwellers.

She mentioned various projects her government has taken to provide housing facilities for the landless, low- and middle-income groups and others and stressed joint initiatives by public and private agencies to resolve the housing problems through planned management.

Referring to the theme of this year's World Habitat Day, which is Women in Urban Governance, the prime minister lamented that the poor women community

among the city dwellers was insecure and deprived of basic amenities.

"This is very significant in Bangladesh perspective since we are also working for empowerment of women and to involve them in the national planning and development initiatives."

She said hers was the first government to formulate the National Women Development Policy and constitute a 44-member National Women Development Council, which is headed by the prime minister.

Hasina also described different programmes her government took up in the past four years for empowerment of women.

Minister for Housing and Public Works Mosharraf Hossain, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Hanif, Secretary-in-Charge of the ministry Quamrul Islam Siddique and UNDP Resident Representative in Dhaka Jorgen Lissner also spoke on the occasion.

Mamata's resignation strategy to woo voters

NEW DELHI, Oct 1: Trinamul Congress leader and Railways Minister Mamata Banerjee's dramatic resignation from the cabinet about six months before the West Bengal assembly elections, is part of her strategy to woo the voters in her state, Indian political analysts say, reports BSS.

Mamata along with her party colleague and Minister of State for External Affairs Ajit Panja yesterday announced their resignation from the cabinet protesting oil price hike and gave the Vajpayee government three days time to roll back the prices or accept their resignation.

Mamata told reporters in Calcutta that she and Panja are resigning because her party was not consulted over the increase in the price of petrol, diesel, LPG and Kerosene. We are a pro-people party and can never support such a decision, she was quoted as saying.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, however, rejected the resignation of Mamata and Panja. A Prime Minister Office (PMO) spokesman said efforts were on to persuade them to withdraw their resignation.

Political analysts say the Trinamul Congress leader became unhappy after the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government did not accept her demand for imposition of president's rule in West Bengal as the state assembly election is approaching.

Mamata is more serious to topple the CPM government which has been in power for more than two decades in West Bengal and working for replacing it by Trinamul Congress. Trinamul Chief, according to an analyst became angry when the centre did not pay heed to her persistent requests to get more flood relief from the central government.

Pacemaker for Amit arrives

By Staff Correspondent
The breathing pacemaker that could save the life of the 12-year-old boy Amit and help him live a decent life, has finally arrived.

The life saving equipment was flown into Dhaka yesterday by United Parcel Service (UPS), the world famous express delivery company. Amit, suffering from the rare wild poliovirus, has been under treatment in intensive care unit at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University for last one year.

Officials of the UPS handed over the equipment to the authorities concerned in the presence of customs officials at Zia International Airport, said a press release.

The purchase of the 40-lakh-taka pacemaker was made possible by virtue of donations from the public.

Rehal Deen, business development manager of UPS was present during handing over of the expensive equipment.

Opposition's joint meet in Dinajpur now on Oct 14

By Staff Correspondent
The BNP-led opposition alliance has shifted its joint public meeting at Dinajpur from October 10 to October 14.

It was decided at a meeting of the Central Liaison Committee yesterday at 29 Minato Road with BNP vice chairman M Shamsul Islam, MP, in the chair. CLC sources said the meeting was shifted when the Dinajpur district All Party Action Council sought more time to complete their preparation for a mammoth gathering.

Dinajpur APAC also told the CLC that it would not be possible for them to continue campaign for the meeting during puja. The CLC later shifted the meeting to October 14.

BNP leaders Dr Mosharraf Hossain, Anwar Zahid, Mirza Abbas and Sadek Hossain Khoka, Jatiya Party leader Kazi Firoz Rashid, Jamaat leaders Abdul Qader Mollah and ATM Azharul Islam and Islami Oikya Jote leader ARM Abdul Matin attended the meeting.

Biman's F-28 stranded in Calcutta

By Special Correspondent
An F-28 aircraft of Bangladesh Biman was left stranded at Calcutta airport in West Bengal, India yesterday.

Biman sources said that Biman flight BG 091 went to

Calcutta yesterday morning but it failed to return to Dhaka after developing engine troubles.

Biman Engineers were dispatched to Calcutta but they were unable to fix the aircraft until last night, sources said.

Shazneen case adjourned till Oct 29

By Court Correspondent

The Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka yesterday adjourned the proceedings of Shazneen Tasnim rape case till October 29.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned by Judge M Shah Alam Miah as he was ill. The first prosecution witness Mojibur Rahman, ASP of CID, was present in the court.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom Group, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help, is the principal accused in the case while contractor Hasan is the alleged mastermind.

All the accused -- Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu -- See page 11

Adel's bail prayer rejected

By Court Correspondent

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday rejected bail prayer of Jahangir Mohammad Adel in a sedition case.

The bail prayer was moved by his lawyer TM Akbar while the court inspector Shah Alam opposed it.

After hearing both the sides, Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa rejected the petition.

Adel, a former Deputy Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation and leader of Jatiya Party, was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail after the CMM's Court rejected his bail prayer on September 13.

Adel is facing sedition charge as Pakistan national flag was hoisted atop his residence in the city on August 14.

Adel surrendered before the High Court on September 10 and prayed for bail.

He spent the night at the chamber of his lawyer at the HC Build. See page 11

Overcrowded jails Govt considering plan to release some under-trial prisoners

By Staff Correspondent

The government is examining release of some under-trial prisoners detained for three years whose maximum punishment, if convicted, would not exceed three years, sources in the Home ministry said yesterday.

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