

Steps suggested to save PDB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) is on the verge of collapse if immediate measures are not taken to make it a commercial entity through rationalising the power tariff structure and giving it the facilities offered to the private power units as well as REB and DESA.

Criticizing the role of donors, who have stopped financing PDB since 1991, participants at the workshop on Power Sector Reforms in the city also observed that no reform in the power sector can take place unless effective measures are adopted by the politicians as well as the bureaucrats.

The day-long workshop, organized by The Independent in association with the World Bank, was moderated by its editor Mahbul Alam while former PDB chairman Nuruddin M Kamal readout the key note paper.

Among others PDB chairman Brig (ret'd) A Malek, Salahuddin Kader Chowdhury MP, energy and mineral resources secretary Azmal Haq, former power secretary Arabinda Kar, former chairman of Atomic Energy Commission Dr Anwar Hossain and representatives of donor organizations attended the workshop.

While presenting the keynote paper the former PDB chairman identified conflicts of interest, low

quality of customer service and lack of autonomy, competition as well as motivation as the reasons for which reform in the power sector has become essential.

He also identified shortage of funds for investment as one of the major problems in the power sector of the country disclosing that an investment of around six billion US dollar is required for the next ten years to cope with the increasing demand of power.

PDB chairman Brigadier M A Malek said that PDB is not getting any subsidy from the government for selling power to organisations like DESA and PDB at a rate which is lower than its production cost, he said, adding PDB is deprived of Tk 100 crore per month due to this.

The independent power plants (IPP) are allowed to import parts, spares and fuel without any tax but PDB is not enjoying such facilities, he added.

"Immediate reform is needed at the distribution end which has so far appeared as the most weak part of the power sector, but donors every one is interested to attend generation and transmission part of the sector", the PDB chairman said.

According to him the present 2800 MW of power is more than enough if misuse of power can be controlled. "If the government is interested it is never impossible to improve the situation", he said.

BNP lawmaker Salahuddin

Kader Chowdhury, also a member of the standing committee for ministry of energy, power and mineral resources, said that for the last four and a half years the standing committee could not have more than one agenda and it was system loss of PDB.

Referring to losing concerns in power sector like DESA and DESCO, he said "the reform should not be done only because WB or ADB is suggesting, we have to think that this is our own need".

Talking about the existing tariff structure, energy secretary Akmal Hossain said "This is not a distortion, rather this is a conscious subsidy that the government is giving". PDB should have been subsidised, he added.

He also observed that the proposed power act and energy act should be placed in the parliament as early as possible.

Dr Anwar Hossain put emphasis on introduction of a two dimensional energy and power policy. One dimension should consider the demand of the country and the other should look into the need of more than 70 per cent people living in the rural areas.

According to him installation of small power plants in rural areas is more viable for our country instead of expanding transmission lines to villages. He also put emphasis on introducing renewable energy and solar electricity plant in the country.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday.

Opposition preparing for mass movement after Eid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secretaries general of the BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday discussed with the city unit leaders of the component parties the preparations for the March 21 grand meeting of the alliance.

Held at the new office of the city BNP with its president Sadeque Hossain Khoka MP in the chair, the meeting took a decision to organise eight public meetings in different parts of the city in between March 13 to 18.

Leaders of the city unit of the four parties will sit today to finalise the meeting venues.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Jatiya Party secretary general Nazir Rahman

Manjur, Jamaat-e-Islami secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Islami Oikya Jote central leader Mohammad Shafiquddin attended the meeting.

Meeting sources said that the four parties will put maximum emphasis to mobilise participants from the city. Secretaries general instructed the city unit leaders of BNP, JP, Jamaat and IOJ to start ground work immediately to make the meeting a success.

Sources said the alliance is planning to give an ultimatum to the government from the March 21 meeting and then proceed towards en-mass resignation from Jatiya Sangsad.

They said that the issue of ultimatum is expected to be finalised after Eid.

Garments workers demand Eid bonus by Mar 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the National Garments Workers' Federation (NGWF) yesterday called upon the garments factory owners to pay outstanding salaries, overtime bills and Eid bonus to the workers before March 5.

"If any factory owner fails to pay salaries for the month of February, outstanding salaries and Eid bonus, we will lay siege to his factory," Amirul Huq Amin, general secretary of NGWF, told reporters at a press conference.

He said he also lay siege to the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) office on March 5 if any member of the BGMEA failed to pay salaries and bonus before March 5.

Other leaders complained that

some of the garments factory owners have been trying to deprive workers by offering half the salary for the month of February.

They said most of the workers would not be able to celebrate Eid festival with their near and dear ones at village homes due to want of money, as many workers do not pay Eid bonus to the workers.

The leaders alleged that a section of garments factory owners do not even regularly pay monthly salaries to the workers.

The garment workers will bring out a torch procession tomorrow at 6:00 p.m. to press home their demands for payments of salary and Eid bonus and will organise rallies at different areas on Saturday and Sunday.

The press conference held at the NGWF office at Segunbagicha was also addressed by Sahida Sarker, Jahangir Mollah and Safia Parvin.

Ekushey book fair ends: Books worth Tk 30 lakh sold

DU CORRESPONDENT

The month-long Ekushey Book Fair concluded yesterday pulling huge crowd on its last day.

About 1400 books were released from different publishing houses at the fair this year and the total sale was around Tk 30 lakh.

Around 100, both small and large publishing houses and different Non Government Organisations (NGOs), social organisation participated in the fair.

Three stalls were awarded for their attractive decorations. Agami Prokashoni won the first prize while Annaproakash and Pathok Somabesh followed the list.

Aaj Chitrar Biye by popular writer Humayun Ahmed was the best seller at the fair this year. Seven editions of the book had to be published at the fair and it sold more than 35000 copies. The second best seller Minmoyee which sold more than 25000 copies was also by the same writer.

Muhammad Zafar Iqbal's science fiction Fobianer Jatree was

sold more than 15000 copies, according to stall owners. The book has also been put up in the web site, www.somoy.com, by its publisher Somoy Prokashan. Readers can also download the book at free of cost.

A total of 37 new books hit the book fair on its last day yesterday. The books include Ghar Nai by Nasir Ali Mamun, Bangladesher Muktijudde CPIM O Ganoshakti and Oboruddha Bangladeshe Pakistani Samorik Janta O Tar Doshorder Taporata by Shukumar Biswas, Bangladesher Obhdudayer Prekhhapat by Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, Bhaskar, compiled by Pulin Roy, Sundarban Somore O Shushamae by Maj. (ret'd.) Ziauddin, Arthanoitk Boishommo O Bangladesher Obhdudayer by Asaduzzaman, Bekar Theke Shilpapat by Prof. Tariqul Islam, Nasir Ahmed'er Nirbachito Kobita by Nasir Ahmed, Bhalobashar Kobita by Zazabar Mintu, Pungta by Uttom Sarker, Jehanejo Chay Shukhe Theko by Dipali Bhattacharya and Chander Ghorbari by Faruq Hossain.

Danish MPs cancel trip

FROM PAGE 1

Marie Bruun-Vieroe told the press. "The hostage-taking opened the committee's eyes to certain aspects of the political situation in Bangladesh to which we had paid little attention in the past," she added.

She did not rule out the possibility that this would influence future Danish policy toward Bangladesh.

Two Danes, Torben Mikkelsen

and Nils Hulgaard, and Briton Tim Selby were seized February 16 by six gunmen in the Rangamati district of Bangladesh. They had been conducting a survey for a government road project.

Bangladesh is a major beneficiary of Danish development aid, receiving 200 million kronor (26.8 million euros, 24.4 million dollars) in 2000. The committee president said Dhaka was due to get 310 million kronor this year.

Leaflets to be dropped

FROM PAGE 1

of the hostages. "Our first concern is the welfare of the hostages and we prefer negotiation to any action," Geddes said.

He maintained the long-standing position of all governments concerned that ransom would never be on the table for releasing the hostages.

He said that all parties were working in close co-operation and holding meetings regular to resolve the crisis.

The joint team has set up an office at the Circuit House with improved facilities.

The new moves indicate that the

authorities are still in the dark about the whereabouts and welfare of the hostages on the thirteenth day of their abduction.

Minister for CHT Affairs Kalparanjan Chakma yesterday returned from Kalapahar area without any information about the hostages, officials claimed.

It could not be known what happened to the tribal go-betweens sent by the minister earlier. The minister had told reporters on Tuesday that he was hopeful of a positive development on Wednesday.

The authorities have meanwhile decided to hold press briefings in a more formalised manner.

Ershad may be freed

FROM PAGE 1

to deal with any type of questioning by tax authorities regarding the source of so much of money.

Firstly, he has prepared a list showing all districts JP leaders have contributed to the fund. If tax authorities are persistent about the source, he intends to submit this list.

Secondly, he has reportedly prepared a document showing his own printing press -- Asiatic Printers -- has been sold and that the money for Ershad's has been derived from there. However, when asked by The Daily Star, Monjur categorically denied such a move.

Ershad Release Fund was created back in last November after Ershad had been sent to jail. It was

announced that each of the JP Presidium members would deposit Tk 2 lakh each. Party secretaries and MPs were to contribute Tk one lakh each.

Following the announcement, the tax department of the government sent a letter to the party asking for a list of the prospective depositors. This letter held back the JP leaders from contributing to the fund.

Ershad was jailed for a term of five years along with a fine of Tk 5.5 crore or six more months in prison in default.

The deposed president has already served out the five-year term and spent three more months -- from November 20 to February 20 -- in jail for his failure to pay the fine.

Helen

FROM PAGE 12

They alleged that the police from the beginning have tried to show it as suicide. They said Alim's family are influential people and that they have manipulated the autopsy.

Farzana's father said that seven days ago when he went to get a copy of the autopsy report, the doctor who conducted the autopsy misbehaved with him.

Parents of the victim said that Helen was deeply religious and would never commit suicide. However it was a known fact that she was frequently tortured by her husband for dowry and there were marks of injury on her body.

Helen was three months' pregnant at the time of her death.

UPDF

FROM PAGE 1

"We are not aware of the whole thing even though UPDF is blamed for every incident in the hills," he quickly added.

Told if they would take up weapons and resume insurgency in the hills, Robi Shanker Chakma rejected such an idea, saying the group was "democratic".

"For the very start we have said our campaign is a democratic one along with all progressive groups in Bangladesh and we have been moving forward in a democratic way, not by weapons."

He described the kidnapping as sad and it would not only go against the tribesmen, but also against the image of Bangladesh.

The UPDF, led by Proshit Khisha, was founded in December 1998 with a five-member executive committee after the 1997 treaty excluded the question of autonomy for the hills districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban, the main demand of the tribesmen.

Humayun Zahir

FROM PAGE 12

judgement on January 9 as he was suffering from heart disease. So he prayed for bail of the accused.

District PP Mohammad Ali opposed the petition stating that the accused showed disregard to the rule of law as he was absent in the court during the judgement.

After hearing both the sides the court sent him to jail rejecting his bail prayer.

Abdul Matin was sentenced to life-term rigorous imprisonment in the case.

Cattle market

FROM PAGE 1

two banks.

At 6:30 p.m. yesterday people with sledgehammers and spikes started raising bamboo fences on the road, creating obstacles to traffic movement. Later in the evening, despite objections by the local people, they went ahead with the second round of fencing.

When asked, a top DCC official said the lessee has no right to use the road and was warned about it.

The High Court in a verdict on February 11 asked the authorities to put into force the relevant provisions of Dhaka Municipal Corporation Ordinance 1983. Section 115 of the ordinance says "no person shall make an encroachment movable or immovable on or over or under a street or a drain or any land... Except under a licence granted by the Corporation and to the extent permitted by the licence."

The lessee was not available for comment.

Trafficking

FROM PAGE 1

about two years.

The gang came to the country 25 days ago. They stayed in the village of the victims and were taking them to India, police said.

The victims told The Daily Star that they were going to India for outing. They contacted the gang leader in this regard. They knew Chandu Das, they said.

Two separate cases were filed with the Mirpur police station for trafficking and trespassing.

Major gas bill defaulter

FROM PAGE 1

ers, in league with a section of unscrupulous meter readers, ledger writers and union activists of Titas and other entities are stealing national resources," observed a source. "And there is not much of seriousness in the government about taking actions against these people."

Several lakhs of domestic users also make a big defaulting group. They owe Titas Tk 242 crore, Bakhrabad Tk 29 crore and Jalalabad Tk seven crore.

"The revenue collection system has been corrupted to a degree that now you cannot expect the industrial and domestic defaulters to pay back these arrears," the source added.

In a recent meeting, the PM asked the Petrobangla chairman why Titas had failed to realise arrears from the Beximco industrial park or take any punitive action

against it, an informed source said.

The Petrobangla chairman told the Prime Minister that Beximco had filed a case against Titas over the arrears and obtained a court injunction. As a result, Titas could not take any action against it. He, however, did not inform the Prime Minister of the Energy Ministry letter sent to Petrobangla a few days back.

The Energy Ministry letter asked Petrobangla not to discontinue supply to the Beximco industrial park and not to "disturb" it.

The ministry felt that disconnecting gas supplies to the park would bring miseries to the industries and their employees there, sources said.

"But the higher authorities are least concerned about the financial pressures being faced by Petrobangla," said a source. "For instance, it is committed to pay the International Oil Companies (IOC) -- Unocal and Shell -- all their arrears

by May next."

Petrobangla owes Shell and Unocal over 100 million US dollars in arrears for purchase of gas from Sangu and Jalalabad gas fields.

"If our clients pay their bills properly, we'll never face any problem of payment," said a Petrobangla official.

Of the total Tk 985 crore in arrears, different state-owned power plants owe the Petrobangla distributors a total of Tk 267 crore (Tk 176 crore to Titas, Tk 47.95 crore to Bakhrabad, Tk 25 crore to Jalalabad and Tk 19 crore to Wesgas).

State-owned fertiliser factories also owe Titas Tk 62 crore, Bakhrabad Tk 61.29 crore, and Jalalabad Tk 36 crore.

"Since these consumers are state owned units, Petrobangla will get paid sooner or later. But what about the few thousand industrial consumers?" questioned an official.

PM: Commando operation

FROM PAGE 1

the one they were supposed to.

She did not rule out the possibility of the anti-peace treaty opposition parties having a hand in the kidnapping but preferred not to comment on the issue for the time being. "We'll have to think whether it is an attempt to foil peace in the region. There are many who do not want to see peace continue in the CHT."

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Choudhury, given the floor by the PM, said it was not true that a Danish parliamentary delegation has cancelled its visit to Bangladesh following the Ranganati abduction. "They will definitely come."

The prime minister termed a "childish act" the opposition threat to force her government to stand down even after she had spent out her offer for an early general election as and when preferred by the leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia.

She further simplified her offer asking the Opposition leader to specify her choice for election any day, anywhere and by any means she may like.

While making her election offer 12 days ago, the PM had said she would accept the Opposition leader's demand if made on the floor of the parliament.

Reacting to Khaleda's earlier comment that it was the Election Commission (EC) not the PM that would announce the election, Hasina asked how could the EC announce election unless she resigned. "If this is the level of her understanding of politics, then she should go to the Election Commission and ask for an early election."

Hasina told journalists that she would decide on the term of the government, which she said was now longer than that of her predecessor Khaleda Zia.

The PM also spoke about a wide range of issues including the US State Department annual report on the situation of human rights in Bangladesh, the current opposition movement, fresh amendment to the Upazila Parishad Act and her meeting with Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

Asked about the US report on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, the PM said, "We've already communicated our views to the US authorities and will soon lodge our formal protest with the US State Department."

Hasina also ridiculed the report, saying it did not focus on the human rights situation in the country. "The weakness of the report is that it was prepared on the basis of local press reports... Besides, it contains many factual errors," she said and blamed newspapers for carrying only the negative points.

The report could have revealed facts had on the US authorities prepared it on their own, she said. The report at times gives one the impression that it was a BNP statement. "We've the right to take legal action against the criminals... we did not do any excess," she said, referring to the application of the controversial Public Safety Act.

To a question, the PM said the Cabinet had approved a fresh amendment to the Upazila Parishad Act empowering the government to decide on the schedule of UZ polls after the Election Commission repeatedly failed to hold the long-pending local polls.

"The Act was defective and the proposed amendment aims to unify

the law with those pertaining to other local government bodies," said Hasina. She did not find anything wrong if the UZ election is held before that of the parliament.

The PM told another reporter that her government had no plan to reduce the two-day weekly holiday to a one-day one. She advised all to ignore hartals and operate private establishments during such programme.

She said she had discussions with Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf during the D-8 Summit on several issues, including the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis. She would give details about the outcome of the talks, however.

The prime minister said the opposition movement against her government has failed and criticised the BNP chief for giving in to the fundamentalist forces in the Four-Party Opposition Alliance.

Asked about the voting rights of Bangladeshi expatriates, she said they should get enlisted as voters with the EC and come back home to exercise their franchise. There is no such provision for voting by staying abroad.

Commenting on an interview of the BBC Bangla Section Editor Syed Mahmud Ali which was published in a local daily recently, she said Ali's alleged involvement in the August 15 killings will be investigated.

Earlier, she issued a written statement describing her participation in the D-8 Summit where she transferred the Chair of the grouping of eight Muslim nations to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Betar to air VOA programmes

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Betar and Voice of America (VOA) signed a five-year agreement in the city yesterday under which VOA programmes will be broadcast by Bangladesh Betar.

The agreement was signed by Deputy Director General of Bangladesh Betar M Muhaddes and Marketing Officer of VOA for South Asia, North Africa and Middle East on behalf of their respective organisations.

The signing ceremony was witnessed, among others, by Information Secretary M I Chowdhury, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters, and Public Affairs Officer of US Embassy John Kincanon.

Under the agreement, VOA will extend all possible cooperation to install FM transmitters at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Rangpur, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Cox's Bazar and Barisal of Pataukhali at a cost of 8 lakh US dollars (about Tk 3 crore and 25 lakh).

In exchange, VOA will directly broadcast its programmes for nine and a half hours daily through these transmitters and the remaining period will be used by Bangladesh

Betar for broadcasting its own programmes.

VOA will pay 60,000 US dollars (about Tk 32 lakh and 40 thousand) to Bangladesh Betar in the first year and fix up the amount for subsequent years later. The agreement is renewable on mutual consent after five years.

Satkhira bypolls

FROM PAGE 12

A center at Tala Bede Government High School under Tala upazila had the lowest turnout with 418 votes cast out of a total of 4138 at about 3 pm, an hour before closing. Atarui Baruehali Government Primary School center and other adjoining centers had the similar picture.

Various polling stations in Kalaroa upazila, the ancestral home of the ruling party candidate, had a comparatively high turnout.

At about 12 noon, Raghunathpur Government Primary School centre saw some 407 votes cast out of 3010 while Helatala Union Parishad centre some 332 out of 2648 votes.

Despite this situation, Deputy Commissioner of Satkhira Abdul Matin Chowdhury expressed satisfaction saying the turnout differs from place to place.

Ershad Shikdar's brother arrested from Jhalakathi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Ershad Shikdar's younger brother Nausher Ali Shikdar, 43, was arrested from Talata bazar of Nalchity upazila in Jhalakathi district on Sunday (Feb 25).

Acting on a tip-off, Nalchity thana police arrested Nausher, the second-in-command of the killing squad of his elder brother Ershad Ali Shikdar.

According to OC of Nalchity thana, Nausher had fled the Skid Ghat soon after the arrest of Ershad on August 11, 1999 and was committing crimes in Jhalakathi district in disguise.

Six general diaries (GD) and four 'Mass Petitions' against him were filed with Nalchity thana during last two years. OC said when contacted over phone yesterday.

KMP will interrogate Nausher in a day or two in connection with several murders committed at the Skid Ghat and Ershad's Ice Factory, said a top level official yesterday.

Three shot in city in separate incidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people were shot in separate incidents in the city yesterday.

Manik, 24, and his elder brother Badal, 35, resident of Bulshahi while they were returning home from Dhaka Central Jail yesterday, hospital sources said.

Badal, a resident of 94/3 Nawabpur Road in Sutrapur was arrested recently in connection with a case filed by his neighbour over a land dispute. Badal was released on bail yesterday afternoon. Manik received his brother (Badal) at jail gate.

Hospital sources said unidentified gunmen opened fire on Badal and Manik when they reached in front of a mosque at Nazimuddin Road by a rickshaw.

Manik was shot in his right thigh while Badal in right hand