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## PM asks ministry to resolve all energy issues before polls

SHARIER KHAN

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has instructed the Energy Ministry to resolve all pending issues concerning foreign investment in the sector, gas policy formulation and restructuring of Titas Gas within the end of this month.

Taking into account the upcoming elections, the PM wants to wrap up these issues, sources said.

All these schemes were initiated a few months to a year back. According to sources, there are some five to six such issues which include a 50-year vision of gas usage, marginal gas-field development policy, investment in compressed natural gas (CNG) and natural gas liquid (NGL), administrative restructuring of Titas Gas and review of production sharing contract (PSC).

All senior and mid-level officials of the ministry and Petrobangla were holding non-stop meetings for the last few days in order to comply with the PM's order.

However, according to a competent source in Petrobangla, considering the short timeframe all the decisions would be taken hastily and as a result the policy planning regarding the 50-year use of energy and marginal gas-field would be very sketchy. "But we are preparing these anyway," said the source.

Hasina announced in presence of US President Bill Clinton during his visit March last year that Bangladesh would first ensure 50 years' gas for its people before deciding on gas export.

Afterwards, she instructed Petrobangla, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to

come up with a 50-year oil and gas usage plan.

A team of Petrobangla experts formed a committee in this regard but never held a single meeting. However, individual experts have written some papers on gas demands and consumption projections. BPC also did not hold any concrete meeting regarding petroleum usage.

Both Petrobangla and BPC are yet to submit any of these reports to the energy ministry, which is assigned to combine their projections and make a report. "We don't believe we can place any report on a 50-year energy usage that would make the PM happy, but we are trying. All we can say is whatever we submit will lack depth," said a source.

Deciding the fate of Titas Gas, the oldest gas distribution company in the country, would be one of the major issues for the ministry to deal with. Titas, which is incurring huge loss due to corruption of a section of unscrupulous employees in collaboration with a segment of commercial and industrial clients, owes over Tk 500 crore to Petrobangla, its parent organisation.

It has been proposed that Titas, which has grown into an unmanageably big entity, should be broken into three organisations. The first area should deal with Narayanganj, the second with Dhaka and the third with Tongi, Gazipur and other areas adjacent to Dhaka.

"In fact it has become so unmanageable now that in Narayanganj, Shamim Osman MP is controlling all gas connection there and Titas officials just obey his orders," said the source.

Another major issue that came up back in December last is investment in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Royal dip... Samrat, the Royal Bengal Tiger, takes refuge in the water tank of its National Zoo cage in Mirpur yesterday for a respite from the intolerable heat wave, now sweeping the capital city and other parts of the country.

## UNSG position Dhaka brushes aside report on Hasina's candidature

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh officials yesterday brushed aside the news circulated by the international media that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is among the contenders for the position of UN Secretary General as 'baseless and bogus'.

Ranking officials at both the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs termed the news "unfounded speculation" and "figment of imagination."

A concerned minister said the question of the UN position does not arise, when she is contesting in the coming polls to be the country's top executive.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Pro-Ershad JP faces another split

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chairman of a faction of Jatiya Party and former president HM Ershad was shifted to the prison cell of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) from the Dhaka Central Jail under tight security yesterday.

A contingent of regular and jail police escorted a white microbus carrying Ershad to the BSMMUH at 12:20 p.m. Alighting from the microbus, the jail superintendent, jailer and other jail officials led Ershad directly to a VIP cabin of the prison cell at block B on the second floor of the hospital.

The jail authorities said the Metropolitan Session's Judge, Dhaka had asked them on Thursday to submit a report on the former president's health to his court by April 8. As the jail doctors could not prepare such a report, the JP chairman was sent to the hospital.

Sources at the BSMMUH said

Ershad was having chest pain and trouble with his eyes and that he was undergoing check-up.

However, a competent source said the government made the arrangement on condition that he would ask his party lawmakers to join the next session of the parliament in defiance of the four-party opposition alliance's objection.

Ershad is also to be taken to the parliament on parole, the source added.

Meanwhile, the Jatiya Party faction loyal to Ershad is now on the verge of another split following removal of Nazir Rahman Manzur from the post of secretary general.

One of the groups loyal to Manzur is saying that it is just a matter of time before a separate Jatiya Party would emerge if Manzur was not reinstated immediately.

JP presidium members loyal to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Betrayal won't affect alliance, says Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary-General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said yesterday BNP has formed alliance with parties, not individuals and there would be no damage to the combine if anyone betrays.

"The alliance will not be affected if anyone quits from the alliance. People of the country are united against the Awami League and this unity can't be breached if anyone commits treachery. It's not the alliance, but those who will desert it will be the losers," he said.

Talking to reporters after a meeting of the Central Liaison Committee at the official residence of the leader of the opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, Bhuiyan said irrespective of their party affiliations people have united to give a befitting reply to Awami League in the upcoming election.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Mosquito menace, water pollution due to dry spell

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Persistent dry spell for over four months has greatly increased mosquito menace in the city and also caused alarming water pollution in the adjacent river Buriganga, where water level has fallen drastically.

Dhaka City Corporation's (DCC) Health Department officials said stagnant water in the city has become extremely polluted due to lack of rain for long. Moreover, hundreds of kilometres of surface drain have become waterlogged.

"Ponds, drains and low lying areas with polluted water in the city is increasingly becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes. In many such areas, it is impossible to control the menace," said DCC Chief Health Officer Dr Mohammed Ashraf Uddin. The usual mosquito eradication programme of his department is continuing in full swing, using adulticide and larvicide, he added.

In many areas, mosquito menace has become intolerable day and night. The areas include Shantinagar, Shahjahanpur, Bashabo, Khilgaon, Gandaria, Mirpur, Rayerbazar, Dhanmondi and Gulshan.

Officials said air pollution in the city has also increased sharply due to lack of rain.

Meanwhile, water flow in the Buriganga is now so low that millions of litres of industrial and human waste from the city are accumulating in its water every day. "Due to virtual absence of current in the river, those are not being carried and dispersed downstream," said an official of the Water Development Board (WDB).

At places, water has become coloured and its smell is unbearable. A large stretch of the river is now totally devoid of aquatic life due to extreme pollution, he said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## BCL, JCD clash at IU: 25 hurt

IU CORRESPONDENT, KUSTHA

At least 25 were injured as the activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatada Chhatra Dal (JCD) clashed at the Islamic University here yesterday.

Witnesses said all the injured were JCD workers. Of them, three were rushed to Kustha General Hospital in a critical condition. They were identified as Murad Ahmed, Sohrab Hossain and Mominur Rahman.

The trouble erupted at around 10.30 am after the BCL activists opened fire on the JCD procession. The JCD brought out the procession protesting the arrest of its president Saiful Islam. The BCL workers also chased their rivals out of the campus.

The BCL activists attacked the JCD workers again at around 1 pm when they regrouped on the campus. Later, police arrested three outsiders Abul Fazal, Hashemuzzaman, and Wazed Ali from the spot and recovered knives from them.

Saiful, JCD president of IU unit, was arrested on Friday night in connection with an incident in which JCD activists ransacked the room of the provost on March 22 protesting the allotment of rooms in the Bangabandhu Hall to 24 BCL activists.

The JCD protesting yesterday's attack announced that they would boycott classes today.

## Commentary

### One threatens, the other dares: For us the voters, nobody cares

MAHFUZ ANAM

In actions which amount to nothing but open invitation for civic chaos both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have turned Bangladesh into a country of uncertainty and fear. Instead of calming the situation they have fuelled an atmosphere of intimidation and insecurity pregnant with the prospect of violence, frontal clash and consequent death. In what can most mildly be termed as irresponsibility of the highest order our two supreme leaders have changed, within a matter of few days, the whole atmosphere of the country from one of relaxed expectation for an early election to one of naked show of strength and unabashed *mastaani*. Opposition's ultimatum (discussed in detail below) was a fundamentally destructive move especially when

the elections are due within 90 days after July 13, 2001 at the latest. It could be, and perhaps still be, held earlier. So why subject the people and the economy to the unnecessary agony of hartals.

The PM's challenge was unbefitting of an administrator. An invitation to "topple me if you can" is nothing more than invitation for street fights, clashes of supporters, closed schools, constant anxiety of the public about disruption of civic and business activities and of course hartals. Compared to her challenge of Thursday, her renewal of the early polls offer from diploma engineers meet on Wednesday was so much more constructive. Why did she not stick to her own plans rather than succumbing to those who are opposed to early polls?

What are the fundamental issues disrupting our political future at the

moment? The opposition has issued an ultimatum to the government to resign by 30th March or face intense mass action in the form of continuous hartals on 1st and 2nd April as a starter. More 'intense programmes' which in our political parlance can only mean more hartals will follow if the government does not step down. Khaleda Zia has also asked the officials not to obey the government's orders and has offered protection for those who would dare do so. The last action, of course, reminiscent of Awami League's so-called Janat Manchha - People's Stage - which was set up outside the secretariat (in front of the Press Club) towards the flag end of BNP's rule in 1996 (March) to attract government servants to walk out on the government of Khaleda Zia.

SEE PAGE 4

## Black Night of Mar 25 today

BSS, Dhaka

The nation will observe today the Black Night of March 25 remembering the barbarous Pakistani occupation forces' crackdown on the unarmed freedom-loving Bangladeshis in 1971.

The military junta suddenly cracked down on the innocent people on that night after several days of mock dialogue in Dhaka, the provincial capital of the then East Pakistan, to negate election mandate of 1970.

The Pakistani army, in their heinous and massive assault dubbed "operation searchlight," killed thousands of innocent and unarmed people including students, teachers Bangalee members of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and the police in the Dhaka city on the night.

In the wake of the military crack

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



Jail officials escort Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad to the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital yesterday.

## MA Hannan airport to help grow pvt sector, expedite export

UNB, Chittagong

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated the MA Hannan International Airport, fulfilling the long-standing demand of the people of Chittagong.

Hasina, who laid foundation of the airport on March 28, 1998, said the MA Hannan International Airport would play an effective role in regional and international air services as well as contribute to the growth of private sector.

At present, only the state-owned Biman Bangladesh Airlines operates a limited number of international flights from the airport. But shortly cargo service operators in the private sector will be able to operate its aircraft from this airport on international routes.

The 50-year-old airport has been developed into international airport at a cost of Tk 541 crore by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) with assistance from the Japanese government. The development work has been completed three months before the schedule.

The prime minister said, "It's a great success for us that the airport could be built with international standard and architectural design within the stipulated time and estimated budget."

She said MA Hannan Airport from now on would operate Boeing-747, Airbus-340, Boeing-777 and DC-10.

Annually, about 600,000 passengers will be able to travel and some 5,650 metric tons of goods can be transported through this airport.

Civil Aviation Minister Engr Mosharraf Hossain, Labour Minister M A Mannan, Mayor A B M Moinuddin Chowdhury, State Minister for Civil Aviation Syed Ashrafal Islam, Japanese Charge d'Affaires in Dhaka Kiyokazu Ota and high officials were also present.

Alongside the Chittagong seaport, the airport would expedite export activities. Hasina said her

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Hasina renews challenge to Khaleda

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Renewing her challenge to the opposition leader to topple the government by next three months, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the opposition is trying to create anarchy in the name of demanding election.

"Vote thief BNP, autocrats and Rajakars are demanding early elections only to create anarchy. In fact, they do not want the election," she told a huge public meeting at Jelepark in Cox's Bazar.

The Prime Minister wondered as to why the opposition leader is not accepting her proposal for transfer of power any day after April 17.

Questioning the justification of Khaleda Zia's ultimatum for resignation of the government by March 30, she said her government is not as weak as Khaleda Zia's.

"We were not involved in corruption... We have three months' time, why should we resign now," she said adding "let her (Begum Zia) try whether she can pull down the government by next three months."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## 4 die as they enter manhole in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four persons met with their tragic end when they entered a 12-foot deep sewerage manhole at Nilkhet intersection in the city yesterday noon.

Three of the victims were identified as Abdul Manna, 32, Zakir Hossain, 30 and Mujibar, 30. Identity of the other could not be known.

Neither police nor fire brigade could confirm what caused the deaths and gave conflicting statements.

Police said it might be a case of electrocution but fire brigade personnel said the four might have died inhaling poisonous gas.

Fire brigade officials said they do not have the logistics to ascertain existence of any gas in the manhole. Fearing explosion or electrocution, their men lifted the four dead bodies from the manhole with the help of a fire hook.

Witnesses, however, suspected that the victims were electrocuted.

A traffic sergeant and a constable who were present there and some traders at nearby Nilkhet market said the incident took place when a team of 'telephone cable joiners' from a private firm - Bengal Electric -- tried to save 'a drug addict' who fell in the manhole while fleeing with some stolen goods at about 11:30am.

The team led by jointer Abdul Mannan, who worked on sub-contract from Bengal Electric, went to Nilkhet crossing at about 11am for cable repair in the manhole.

They opened the manhole cover and waited on the main road for some time to avoid possible danger from any accumulated gas in it. At this time, the drug addict stole a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## 7 killed, 40 injured in Tangail road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Seven people were killed and 40 injured when a Mymensingh bound passenger bus of Nirapad Paribahan skidded off the road at Elenga, on the eastern side of the Bangabandhu Bridge at 12 noon yesterday.

Twenty-five injured were rushed to the Tangail Sadar Hospital. Of them condition of five was serious, attending doctors said.

UNB adds, the accident occurred when the bus fell into a ditch after a tyre of its front wheels burst with a big bang.

Residents of the area rushed to the spot, rescued the injured and took them to the hospital.

One of the injured died on way to the hospital and two others expired soon after they were brought to Tangail General Hospital. Identity of the victims could not be known.

Another report from Manikganj says, at least 17 people were injured when a Dhaka-bound minibus fell into a roadside ditch near Mohadebpur bus stand on Dhaka-Aricha highway yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the bus coming from Aricha met the accident at about 1 pm as its driver lost control over the steering while giving side to a bicycle.

Fifteen of the injured were admitted to Manikganj Sadar Hospital while two critically injured Khorsheed and Majed were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

A case was filed with Gheor thana.

## AL public meet at Paltan today

BSS, Dhaka

The Awami League will organise a public meeting at Paltan Maidan at 3 pm today, a party press release said last night.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting.

## INSIDE TODAY

Article 4

Foot and mouth disease and our response  
Column: Connecting the Dots  
Dr AR Choudhury

Law and Our Rights 9

Legal regime of people's right to vote and Caretaker government and general elections

Business 6 & 7

Locals trying to tap business potential at Thai trade fair  
DSE, CSE price quotations

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 25		6.11 pm
Mar 26	5-57 am	

## Prayer Timings

March 25	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-10	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-30
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-21
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation