

PDB to be made corporation

UNB, Dhaka

In a radical change, Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) would be made corporation and its power stations transferred into public limited companies.

Also, distribution and billing systems of DESA would be separated in the massive reforms that the donors suggest are imperative to salvage the problem-ridden power sector.

Following the restructuring, private investment would be encouraged in power generation and distribution to give a boost to the limping sector.

The plan was discussed in a meeting here yesterday between State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmud and a six member delegation of the World Bank.

In the meeting at the minister's office, assurances came for necessary assistance to mitigate "poor state" of the sector and ensure its development, breaking the donor agency's 15-year moratorium on

financing it.

The meeting put special emphasis on privatisation of power generation, transmission and distribution system to "save the power sector from destruction," said an official release.

"The government has undertaken an integrated development and reform programme for development of the sector," Iqbal told the delegation, led by WB country director in Dhaka Frederic T Temple.

He apprised the donors that a high-powered advisory council has been formed to review the sector's activities and formulate recommendations for a bailout.

As part of the government programme, he told the delegation a special drive against unauthorised power users as well as defaulters would start in the command area of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA).

"Neither government and autonomous bodies nor private enterprises will be spared," he said.

Ombudsman appointment

FROM PAGE 1
law will undergo a little change in the coming parliamentary session to facilitate the functions of ombudsman," he said.

The law minister said the government of late president Ziaur Rahman enacted a law in this regard in 1980, but no progress could be made due to his tragic assassination in 1981. "Even the Awami League government did not make any headway towards this, although it was their commitment", he told the newsmen.

The existing law says that the President, as per the recommendation of parliament, will appoint a person of proven legal or administrative ability and conscientious integrity to the post. The ombudsman will subject to the section of the law concerned, hold office for a three-year term and be eligible for one more term.

The law further says that the ombudsman shall not be removed from his office except by an order of the President, passed pursuant to a resolution of the parliament supported by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the total number of members on the ground of proved misconduct or physical incapacity. The ombudsman as per the existing law may resign his office by writing to the President.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed said all formalities for appointment of an ombudsman and establishment of his office would be completed as early as possible since it was the election pledge of the present government. "The government

wants to provide the ombudsman the status of chief justice," he said. "We are giving priority to the suggestions of Law Commission in this regard."

He referred to the present government's basic principles of good governance at all administrative levels and said the appointment of an ombudsman as per the constitutional mandate would go a long way in the history of Bangladesh.

New Year's gift

FROM PAGE 12
tion of Bangladeshi doctors living in California, donated other accessories.

"So far as there are not enough plastic surgeons in the country, I believe we can continue organising such camps in every upazila for reconstructive surgeries and small operations. The idea is to encourage local teams of doctors and nurses and shore up confidence among patients," said Dr Samanta Lal Sen.

The plastic surgery camp organised at government initiative was first-ever in the country. At private initiative, the first such camp was organised in Pabna by Dr Hasan Sawar and Prof Umar Ali.

Among other volunteers were Dr Sawarul Alam, Dr Hasan Sawar, Dr Abdur Rashid, Dr Manas Basu, Dr Abdur Rahman and Sheuly Khatun, a nurse.

Shahbazpur gas field

FROM PAGE 1
"The Power Development Board (PDB) was not interested to buy gas from Shahbazpur and BAPEX did not plan laying a pipeline to supply the gas to places like Khulna. The overall gas market was too small to justify further investment," said a Petrobangla source.

He said that in mid-96, when BAPEX was preparing a plan for development of Shahbazpur field, Unocal was one of many foreign oil companies which expressed interest to work with BAPEX.

"Unocal had given a joint venture proposal to BAPEX under which it would lay a pipeline from Bhola to Khulna and set up a power plant there. All it wanted was a government guarantee for sale of the power. It was totally different from the WRIP.

"Yet, the government decided to sidetrack BAPEX and go for an exclusive hush-hush deal with Unocal in early '97 through signing a Letter of Intend (LOI). As a result of

signing of the LOI, Unocal submitted the WRIP proposals outlining development of the gas field, setting up of gas pipeline and four power plants," the source pointed out.

Although an attractive proposal, WRIP could never move fast due to its cost, pricing components and complicated proposal designing. Petrobangla experts had been arguing about its "harmful" implications, saying it would lead to heavy losses for Bangladesh. Besides, Unocal did not submit any feasibility study to back up the economics of the project, the experts argued.

Later, with the assistance of the US government, the government sought help of a US consultant -- Parsons -- to scrutinise WRIP components. Parsons submitted its report a couple of months back and spotted innumerable loopholes.

In such a situation, the government in late 2000, suspended the WRIP and proceeded with BAPEX.

Double-murder

FROM PAGE 12
a relative of Mockbul, went to the residence of his brother-in-law Babul and from there to his own house. The day before, Pasha hatched a plot to kill the two brothers at the house of one Bulbul.

Police said that there were at least seven cases against Pasha -- four murders and three under the arms act pending with different police stations. He is an FIR-listed accused in the Shamim and Masud murder case -- both of whom were killed at the PWD office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and also in the Ashique murder case. Ashique, a contractor, was killed at Shahbagh. Pasha was also accused in the Palash murder case. He was killed in the city's Mohammadpur area.

Detective Branch (DB) of Police took up the case on May 6 and assigned the then DB Inspector AKM Moshinuzzaman to investigation. Later, he was appointed officer-in-charge (OC) of Mohammadpur Police Station.

The case was later handed over to SM Newazi when he was appointed the OC of Mohammadpur Police Station following the transfer of Moshinuzzaman to Dhaka Range. Newazi submitted the charge-sheet

accusing Pasha and driver of the car. But Pasha is yet to be arrested.

Instead of arresting Pasha, police helped him get off scot-free and leave the country. After a long stay abroad, Pasha came back home and fortified his position with the help of Ehsanul Haq Setu, a ward commissioner, Babul and Bulbul -- all identified criminals.

Amjad Hossain told The Daily Star that police did not arrest Pasha though he was moving freely in Mohammadpur area. "Seven or eight days ago, he was seen along with one Bipul Sarkar," Amjad said.

Pasha and his gang are now threatening his family members with death if they push ahead with the case, Amjad alleged. "Even one of his accomplices asked my younger son for negotiation," he continued.

Deprived of justice, the victims' family held a press conference on Monday last (December 31) at the Jatiya Press Club where Amjad Hossain appealed to the prime minister for justice.

He also demanded reinvestigation into the case, as the charge-sheet has been made without proper investigation under the directives from Mockbul Hossain.

BCL activist shot, chopped at Barisal

UNB, Barisal

An activist of pro-Awami League Chhatra League (BCL) was critically injured as miscreants shot and chopped him at Battala in the town yesterday evening.

Witnesses said the terrorists, numbering 10, attacked BCL activist Helal, 29, in the area at about 8 pm and fired shots in his belly.

They later chopped him with sharp weapons. He was admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

India unilaterally puts up border pillar inside Bangladesh territory

UNB, Nilphamari

India yesterday unilaterally put up a border pillar, occupying one mouja of Purbo Chhatnai union in Dimla upazila.

Residents said Indian border security force (BSF) trespassed and put up the pillar at Kismat Char well inside Bangladesh territory along Teesta river.

The unilateral action in the area where demarcation of border by a joint survey remained pending for long has triggered tension among BDR and BSF.

Deputy Commissioner Abdul Bari Khan and Police Super Abdul Jalil Mondal admitted the unilateral and illegal action of BSF occupying a mouja of Dimla upazila.

Bomb blast: 2 children hurt at Barisal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Two children were injured seriously in a bomb explosion on the roof of a two-storied building behind the sadar hospital here at about 2:30 pm yesterday.

The bomb exploded when the two children, identified as Alamin, 10, and Shabnoor, 8, were playing on the roof, local people said.

Both were admitted to the hospital in critical condition.

ETV Hearing

FROM PAGE 1
between ETV and the Ministry of Information alleging that the deal did not follow legal procedures.

The High Court Division issued a rule on September 19, 2001 and stayed terrestrial broadcast of the ETV, using the BTV towers by an order on September 27, 2001.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court later stayed the High Court order regarding leave petitions filed by the ETV and the government challenging the High Court order.

The Appellate Division on October 30, 2001 extended the order of stay on High Court order for four months and asked the lawyers concerned to take steps to dispose of the case within the time.

Telecom deal

FROM PAGE 1
BTB's other similar projects. "Alcatel's charging of \$ 2000 for 'warranty support' during the one-year warranty period of its equipment is also something illogical," commented a BTB source.

Through such inflated costs and inexplicable service charges, the BTB has suffered more than \$ 710,000 in loss.

Despite being BTB's supervisory body, the MoPT ignored such critical issues.

When contacted for comments, the chairman of BTB referred this reporter to consult the Member (Maintenance and Operations). The member refused to comment on these issues.

Polybag

FROM PAGE 12
market, jute bags were hardly available during the Friday and Saturday rush hours. Few shops sold small jute bags but the stocks exhausted soon. A section of traders grabbed the opportunity to increase prices of the carrier bags.

Small vegetable traders said they are very happy over the ban on polythene bags. It (the ban) not only saved their cash but also protected farmlands, ponds, rivers and the city drains, some of them told this correspondent.

"People might find it difficult for a few days but we are sure we shall all get used to the change," said a vegetable trader in Mohammadpur.

The overwhelming response of the people to reject polythene bags has surprised even the traders. A large grocer in Mohammadpur said he had not seen such a participation of people in tackling a problem since the War of Liberation.

"During the war we were all together to fight an enemy. After such a long time when I see people have totally rejected use of polythene, I feel proud," said grocer Mosley Uddin.

SAARC pledges to tackle terrorism

FROM PAGE 1
attended the summit chaired by Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The Declaration underscored the importance of annual summits in charting common strategies for realizing the objectives and principles set out in the charter of the regional association. (The 11th summit was held more than three and a half years behind the schedule).

The 11-page Declaration stipulated the goals of regional cooperation in the economic sector, poverty alleviation, cooperation in social and cultural sectors, welfare of women and children, cooperation in education, international politics and economic environment.

The other goals are security of small states, eradication of terrorism, report of the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP), enhancing political cooperation, setting up a South Asian Development Fund, people-to-people contact, rationalization of SAARC and institutional issues and SAARC award.

UNB adds: To give effect to the shared aspirations for a more prosperous South Asia, the leaders agreed to the vision of a planned process eventually leading to a South Asian Economic Union.

The Heads of State or Government stressed that equitable sharing of the benefits of regional cooperation is essential to achieve and maintain a minimum acceptable level of economic and social development in each member state.

Reiterating their resolve to promote the regional identity and strengthen cooperation at the international level, they also empha-

sized evolving common positions on issues of shared interests at the international fora.

For a South Asian Free Trade Area, they directed the Council of Ministers to finalize the Draft Treaty Framework by this year. They also directed member states to expedite action to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers and structural impediments to free trade.

The heads of state or government renewed their commitment to encourage the participation of the private sector.

The SAARC leaders recognised the immense tourism potential of South Asia and underlined the need of taking measures to promote South Asia as a common tourist destination through joint efforts upgrading infrastructure and air linkages.

They reaffirmed their pledge to undertake effective and sustained poverty-alleviation programmes through "Pro-poor growth" strategy with specific sectoral targets.

The leaders agreed that a special session on poverty alleviation at the ministerial level should review policies and programmes carried out so far and to recommend further concrete measures for the next SAARC Summit.

Expressing concern at the region's special vulnerability in the slowdown in world economy the Kathmandu Declaration of SAARC called for a supportive international environment and enhanced level of assistance by international community for poverty alleviation.

They called upon the international community to assist Member States of SAARC to deal effectively with the adverse economic effects

of terrorism.

The Leaders recognised the debilitating and widespread impact of the HIV/AIDS, TB and other communicable deadly diseases on the population of South Asia and stressed the need for evolving a regional strategy to combat these diseases.

They agreed to establish a voluntary fund, with contributions from member states, individuals, and donor countries and agencies, for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims of trafficking.

The Leaders recognised 'the need to form an autonomous advocacy group of prominent women personalities from the Member States with a view to making recommendations to the SAARC bodies on a broad spectrum of gender-related issues.'

The SAARC leaders agreed to mobilize resources and intensify actions to achieve a set of priority goals related to improving the status of children, such as polio eradication by 2005 and protection of children from HIV/AIDS.

About education, they instructed the concerned Ministries of the Governments to devise appropriate strategies for raising the quality of education through the exchange of information among the universities in the region.

Emphasizing mutual recognition of the educational institutions, they agreed to give the necessary impetus to realizing the goal of a common regional educational standard through uniform methods of instruction and teaching aids.

Changes in admin

FROM PAGE 12

Ministry.

The services of Colonel Mohammad Nurunnabi, who was Principal of RAJUK Uttara Model School and College, have been placed under the Armed Forces Division for his return to Bangladesh Army again.

On the other hand, Lt Col M Sarwar Shahid, PSC, of Artillery has been transferred to Shipping Ministry as Director (Security) of Chittagong Port Authority. He will be there on deputation.

As Lt Col Sarwar will replace Lt Col M Ainul Azim, the latter has been attached to the Armed Forces Division for his return to the army.

Khan Shahabuddin, private secretary to former President Shahabuddin Ahmed who was later attached to the Establishment Ministry, has been transferred to Science and Technology Ministry as a joint secretary.

Mahmud Hasan Mansur, Director General of Foreign Aided Projects Monitoring Board,

has been transferred as a DG at the Prime Minister's Office.

Joint secretaries M Khalequzzaman has been transferred from Health and Family Welfare Ministry to Industries Ministry, Bhuiyan Rafiuddin Ahmed from Parliament Secretariat to Fisheries and Livestock Ministry, M Nazmul Ahsan from Land Ministry to Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry and ABM Abul Kashem, who was an OSD, to Finance Division.

In another order four more joint-secretary-level officials have been sent to different ministries for new postings on deputation.

Of them, Mohammad Abdul Karim has been sent to Social Welfare Ministry for posting as executive director of Al Nahian Trust. He will replace Mohammad Mujibur Rahman.

Ochut Pada Goswami who was joint secretary in Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry has been sent to Textiles Ministry for posting as a member of Bangladesh Handloom Board.

Pak plane

FROM PAGE 1
Himalayan state of Jammu-Kashmir.

Pakistani military officials immediately denied the report.

"No Pakistani spy plane has been shot down by India in the Himalayan region of Kashmir," a senior military official said, speaking only on condition of anonymity.

Another Pakistani military official suggested that India may have shot down a child's remote-control drone.

The Indian army spokesman said that the plane was seen going down and soldiers were scouring the mountainous area to locate the debris. It was also possible that a part of the debris could have fallen in the Pakistani side of the border, he said.

Eyewitnesses who saw the UAV unmanned aerial vehicle flying overhead said there was panic among Poonch residents, who thought war had broken out.

Since a Dec. 13 terrorist assault on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, India and Pakistan have amassed thousands of troops along the 1,800-kilometre (1,100-mile) border between the two nuclear-armed nations.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1
to import more goods like jute, jute products, ceramics and melamine from Bangladesh.

Deuba in this regard urged Dhaka to consider tariff reduction on fruit and other food items imported by Bangladesh.

He expressed gratitude for Bangladesh's cooperation in the higher education of Nepalese students in Bangladesh. He also mentioned the training of Nepalese officers in Bangladesh Military Academy.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, PM's Political Secretary Haris Chowdhury, Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were present during the meeting.

India, Pakistan hold 'bilateral chat

FROM PAGE 1
President Chandrika Kumaratunga said.

She said she was in the room with the two leaders as they waited for their escorts to leave and "jokingly said this is the right time for a bilateral summit. Then they started talking."

Kumaratunga said the countries' foreign ministers joined them in the room and that they were "speaking very animatedly" when she left them alone 10 to 15 minutes later.

Both leaders downplayed the meeting, saying no negotiations took place.

"There were exchanges of courtesies, nothing more," Vajpayee told reporters.

He said the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was "not a place for bilateral meets."

"We should not push it (the bloc) towards a crisis-like situation that takes us away from the objective of SAARC," said Vajpayee, who had ruled out a meeting with Musharraf until he cracked down harder on Pakistan-based Islamic militants.

Musharraf -- who startled the summit at its opening Saturday by reaching for Vajpayee's hand on stage -- said his "informal" discussions with Vajpayee were not "negotiations."

But he added: "I am looking forward to formalising the interactions and reducing the tensions between the two countries."

Musharraf called Vajpayee, whom he last in met July for a failed summit in the Indian city of Agra, "my friend now and in the future" and called for talks to end the "dangerous standoff" between the



Bangladesh Environment Movement yesterday organised a rally in the city to demand, among other things, ban on selling wild birds as pets.

nuclear-capable countries.

He said he would welcome the dispatch of a US envoy to defuse the crisis.

The proposal for an emissary is being considered by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who an Indian official said called Vajpayee in Kathmandu on Saturday.

Vajpayee, departing from his prepared text at the summit Saturday to respond to Musharraf's handshake, cited his past experience in peace-making to show his distrust of Pakistani intentions.

"I went to Lahore with a hand of friendship. We were rewarded by aggression in Kargil (in Kashmir) and the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft from Kathmandu," he said.

"I invited President Musharraf to Agra. We were rewarded with a terrorist attack on the Jammu and Kashmir assembly and last month on the parliament of India."

The latter attack has pushed India and Pakistan into a tense military stand-off on their border, with New Delhi withdrawing its ambassador from Islamabad for the first time since their last full-blown war 30 years ago.

Meanwhile, Vajpayee returned to Delhi on Sunday after the SAARC Summit at which he said there was "no talk of de-escalation of military tensions" with Pakistan.

Vajpayee who arrived at the Indira Gandhi International Airport at 3:30 pm (1000 GMT), told reporters he had simply exchanged "courtesies" with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, and did not hold any bilateral talks.

"We had a normal conversation

AL on Shahabuddin's remarks

FROM PAGE 1

The AL did not win the 1991 election when he was president and yet Sheikh Hasina did not consider him to be a devil. Instead, she regarded him to be an upright man and requested him to be president once again, said the AL press release. "Perhaps, he will realise the unfairness of his remark if he reflects calmly on its implications," it added.

It also observed that the former president had made three specific complaints about former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

As regards the alleged request made by AL leaders to cancel the October 1 general elections and hold a fresh one, the immediate past ruling party said it is the election commission not the president who has power to cancel the elections. "So why should anyone request him to do something that he could not have done?"

It said the party has made a public demand for the cancellation of the elections vitiated by rigging, violence and intimidation. But the former president has made an unwarranted comment to show the AL in a bad light, not to enlighten the public.

About the specific complaints by Shahabuddin about the former prime minister's remarks about him, the AL categorically replied: First, he is chagrined that she said that he has broken the trust of the nation.

"This is a view shared by millions of other citizens. He may disagree with this view but he cannot expect that everybody must accept his view. History alone is the final arbiter in such matters."

About his remark that he did not give any undertaking to the AL, the reply said it was just an angry outburst and perhaps one should overlook such comments unbecoming of a person in his position.

Secondly, the counter-statement said he claimed that he did not use the armed forces against the AL. In saying so, he has made an unwanted comment about the army chief.

"It is interesting that a valiant freedom fighter's determination to rid the country of collaborators is presented by Justice Shahabuddin as a partisan matter," said the AL statement. Instead of bringing up such irrelevant matters, he should have clarified to the nation the rationale for the hastily drafted ordinance that brought changes in the electoral laws of the country, the statement continued.

The AL wishes to take this opportunity to reiterate its full confidence in patriotism and neutrality of the armed forces considered a pride for the nation, it said.

"It is astonishing that such major changes in the electoral laws were made by the CEC and the chief advisor without any popular mandate," added the statement questioning the CEC's move to by-pass the parliament in bringing such major changes.

"The nation expected that the president would prevent any such change that did not have national consensus behind it or which did not have parliamentary approval," it said.

About the deployment of armed forces during the election, it said the AL did not oppose the deployment of armed forces, but it was not in favour of changing their role hastily just before the election.

"The law was changed to give a wider role to the armed forces, and this was done as soon as Begum Zia approached him," it alleged adding that the former president did not follow the practices followed in the elections of 1991 and 1996.

The Awami League has consistently maintained that the armed forces were misled by the office of the chief advisor that supplied fabricated lists of so-called suspected terrorists to them. These lists were in fact those of local AL leaders, activists and volunteers, said the AL statement.

"In the isolation of the Bangabhaban, he may have received biased reports but there are thousands of witnesses and thousands of victims who will testify that his remarks on the issue are not based on facts," it added.

On the third point relating to the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the AL statement said that given Justice Shahabuddin's background as former chief justice, it is natural that Sheikh Hasina would share the anguish of an aggrieved daughter and frustration of the nation with the president and seek his wise counselling.

"No one will ever know what exactly transpired during these meetings that are supposed to be confidential."

The AL alleged that Justice Shahabuddin in his statement has defended the chief advisor's motivated transfers and appointments. "The nation has already drawn its own conclusion about the unfortunate role played by this man but it is interesting that Justice Shahabuddin felt compelled to defend himself."

He knew, the AL reply said, a large number of promotions of mid-level officers (more than four hundred) were held up due to court cases. The final judgment on some of these cases were cleared off the deck and all these promotions (and corresponding postings) took effect almost at the same time.

"So, excuses for the mass transfers by the caretaker government is untenable and there are grounds to believe that it was part of the blueprint designed to pit the entire administration against the Awami League," claimed the AL.

But enough has been written on these matters and once again, the people will ultimately decide on the veracity of allegations. The AL does not want to engage itself in a running debate with Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad on these and other matters, it asserted.

It blamed the former president for harshly attacking the senior editors, columnists for analysing his role during the critical days that preceded and followed the election. Those who read these columns will undoubtedly decide whether these are "examples of falsehood and distortion," believes the AL.