

5 pc regulatory duty imposed on coal imports

UNB, Dhaka

The government has imposed a 5 per cent regulatory duty on coal imports in a bid to raise revenue earnings as well as discourage imports.

This will increase the consumption of locally produced coal, authorities observed.

With this, duty and taxes on industrial coal imports will be 33 per cent, including 5 per cent import duty and 15 per cent VAT. The regulatory duty will bring roughly Tk 5 crore as additional import revenue from coals.

Coals are mainly imported from India and the volume was worth Tk 74 crore in 1999-2000 financial year, from which National Board of Revenue earned roughly Tk 21 crore as import revenues.

Revenue officials said they do not feel that minimum regulatory duty would incite price hike of imported coals in local market.

A Commerce Ministry official justified the imposition of regulatory duty saying that some sort of restriction should be imposed on coal imports to encourage use of local coals. Barapukuria coals are superior in quality than those imported from Indian State of Meghalaya, which are cheaper.

Cousin of Nasim arrested

UNB, Sirajganj

A district Awami League leader, cousin of former home minister Mohammad Nasim, was arrested yesterday when he went to deposit his licensed firearms.

Abu Yusuf Surya, general secretary of the district Awami League, went to Sadar thana at 10 am to surrender his licensed revolver and shotgun under a government directive.

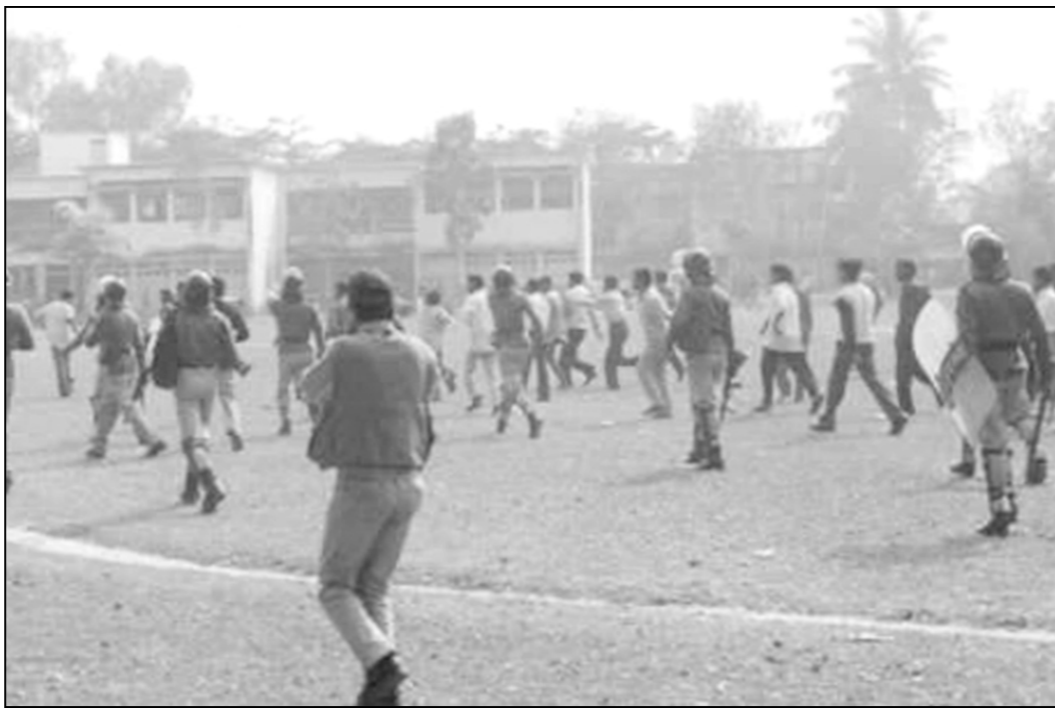
"The OC asked me to take a seat, phoned an official and then arrested me without showing any reasons," said Surya in police custody.

He was sent to jail after being produced before a court at 1 pm.

Thana sources said Abu Yusuf Surya was arrested on charge of selling fire to the house of a BNP activist in the town during the caretaker government's period. They declined to say more in this regard.

District Awami League leaders condemned the arrest and held a press conference at its office at 4:30 pm. They demanded immediate release of Surya and other leaders and activists of AL and its front organisations.

They threatened to launch a tough agitation programme, if they were not released within seven days.



The clash between Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Islami Chhatra Shibir on the Government B.L. College campus in Khulna yesterday left four persons injured.

PM at arsenic conference

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So far over 10,000 arsenic-affected patients have been detected, Khaleda, quoting compiled figures, informed the session.

Now a countrywide intensive patient survey is going on and the number of the patients is likely to increase at the end of the search, she apprehended.

"The arsenic problem has become a great threat to our public health. Ensuring supply of arsenic-free water in affected and risky areas is the first means to escape the danger," she observed.

"We'll finish within this year the testing of water from each tubewell of those upazilas where arsenic has been identified in any tubewell in preliminary survey," she said.

At the same time work is going on to identify arsenic patients testing inmates of every house of those upazilas as well as to make people of those areas aware about the scourge.

Already, locals, local government institutions and local administrations have been involved in the drive. Various non-government organisations are imparting necessary training and assistance. So far survey in 45 upazilas has been

completed.

The Prime Minister said urgent responsibility rested with the government to ensure alternative water supply sources in areas where drinking of tubewell waters has been restricted.

Under the circumstances, she said, the government has taken an emergency programme to arrange at least one source of arsenic-free safe water in such village where 80 per cent of tubewells have arsenic contaminated water.

Besides, Khaleda said, community-based arrangements are being made by organising people to supply arsenic-free water in the areas where 40 per cent tubewells are arsenic-polluted.

Emphasising proper diagnosis of the arsenic-related diseases of those primarily identified as infected, the Prime Minister said physicians and medical scientists immediately would have to reach a consensus regarding diagnosis of disease caused from arsenic.

She also stressed the need for a consensus among specialists on the effectiveness of various food and medicines in preventing and curing the arsenic-related diseases. At the same time decision should

come in management of patients in different stages of the disease, she said hoping that specific recommendations will come out from the workshop through united effort of specialists from home and abroad.

The PM said, "We want to ensure the health service of arsenic patients. For this, necessary training is being given to physicians and health workers in district and upazila levels."

Termining arsenic poisoning as a multidimensional problem, Khaleda said multifarious effects of this problem are spilling over into water supply, health, agriculture, irrigation, environment and other sectors.

Khaleda Zia said Bangladesh is enormously rich in water resources. "It is our responsibility to ensure proper use and management of this resource as water will be considered a precious wealth for future generations."

The Prime Minister thanked the donor countries and international development partners for standing beside Bangladesh and assuring further assistance and cooperation in tackling the Herculean problem.

Tripura rebels gun down 16 Bengali settlers

REUTERS, Agartala

Indian tribal separatists have shot dead 16 Bengali settlers, including three children, in the northeastern state of Tripura, police said yesterday.

Sunday night's attack, one of the bloodiest in the remote insurgency-ravaged state, was targeted on the main market in the village of Singichara, 70 km east of Agartala, the state capital.

Seventeen people were wounded.

Police said the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) was responsible. "Armed NLFT extremists raided the market and opened indiscriminate fire on the people gathered at the market," the state's director general of police, B.L. Vohra, told Reuters.

HC to hear bail petition of Shahrir today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A division bench of the High Court will hear the petition on bail of writer and columnist Shahrir Kabir, an accused in a sedition case, today.

The bench comprising Justice M Azizul Haq and Justice Nazrul Islam fixed the date following a petition seeking bail against the rejection order of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's court, Dhaka.

The Session court rejected the bail petition of Shahrir Kabir on January 2.

Shahrir Kabir was detained by the Special Branch of Police at Immigration Airport on his return from Kolkata on November 22, last year, alleged involvement in anti-state activities abroad. No specific case was filed against Kabir till December 7 last year.

Shahrir Kabir was given one month's detention under the Special Powers Act (SPA) on November 25 last year.

Bill to repeal PSA

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fine their duties until these are nullified through a government gazette notification.

Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed said the repeal bill would be placed in the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad. The government has initiated a process to withdraw all political cases aimed at harassing the accused.

The government had in principle approved the bill for the repeal of PSA on January 7.

There are about 15000 persons accused in nearly 2500 unresolved cases under the PSA.

After the PSA took effect during the reign of the Awami League government on February 15, 2000, over 4200 cases were filed against over 32000 people till December last. BSS adds: The meeting approved in principle the proposal for naming the Agriculture University as Mymensingh Agriculture University.

Several other proposals, including introduction of Safe Blood Transfusion Law-2002 and amendment to the Supreme Court Judges Travelling Allowances Ordinance, 1976, were also approved in the meeting.

The Cabinet meeting also okayed the proposal for turning the Child-Mother Health Institute in Matuail of the city into an autonomous institution.

Mockbul's son

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ments. So, the petition for bail is granted, the court added.

The defence lawyers submitted a criminal appeal on January 1 seeking bail to the Sessions Judge's Court against the rejection order of the CMM's court, Dhaka. Later, the Judge Court heard the appeal on Saturday.

and gave the order yesterday. The CMM's court on December 6 last year rejected the bail petition of Masud.

Police arrested Masud from his Anik Overseas office in the city's Banani area on November 17 last year and recovered one foreign pistol, one shotgun, 178 bullets, and one bullet-proof jacket.

Masud was shown arrested in the S. M. Murad Hossain alias Raj murder case on December 1, last year.

Murad was shot dead by a group of assailants behind the Shyamoli Cinema Hall in the city's Mohammadpur area at 8:30 pm on October 17 last year.

Victim's wife Biklis alias Keya filed a murder case with Mohammadpur thana against some unidentified people the same day.

The victim's father Mohammad Mosarraf Hossain filed another case with Mohammadpur thana accusing seven people after two days of the incident.

41 TCF gas

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Strategic policy expert of HCU M Moinul Huq said at the press briefing, "Possible reserve was not included in the past Petrobangla studies and in this study, we have included the possible reserve."

"The recovery rate mentioned in our study (in the four major gas fields) is not anything new. The Petrobangla-French Petroleum Institute study in 2000 showed 74 per cent recovery rate in Habiganj."

In the previous estimate used by Petrobangla, the recovery rate in Habiganj gas field was 52 per cent while the HCU-NPD study showed a recovery rate of 75 per cent.

BNP convention

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the AL rule. This is our earlier announced convention and therefore it has no link with the AL's convention."

A preparatory committee and several sub-committees will be formed soon to make the convention a grand success.

Replying to a question whether the government would take any initiative to bring AL to parliament, Bhuiyan said, "I can assure that the opposition will be given time to speak in parliament," and called upon AL to join parliament session and play a 'constructive role'.

Asked about Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's statement that the government would soon initiate dialogue with AL to bring them to parliament, Bhuiyan said, "Certainly, she has taken such a move. But I have no specific idea about it."

Bhuiyan said the meeting reviewed performance of the government and expressed satisfaction over initiating steps for implementation of polls pledges

given to the nation.

Secretary General of Bangladesh Jatiya Party Kazi Firoz Rashid said so far the performance of the government is 'excellent' and it has already implemented a number of vital polls pledges.

The decisions on free education and stipend for girl students up to 12th class, stipend of Tk 100 per month for primary school students and ban on polythene shopping bag etc are 'revolutionary,' he felt.

Jamaat Secretary General and Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mujahid criticised the reported remarks of AL chief Sheikh Hasina both at home and abroad. Her remarks clearly went against the interests of the country and its people and she should refrain from making such 'irresponsible' statements, he said.

Acting secretary general of Islami Oikya Jote ARM Abdul Matin also spoke at the briefing. BNP central leader Syed Emran Saleh Prince was also present at the briefing.

Politics hots up

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cate an effective parliament for the sake of democracy, lack of proper initiative keeps the opposition away from parliament, political observers believe.

Asked about recent political developments, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star yesterday that instead of trying to bring AL to the House, the government is vitiating the democratic atmosphere by unleashing attacks on the opposition programmes one after another.

"The government's attitude is something like that the opposition has no existence and it (the government) does not have minimum regard for the opposition political parties," said Hamid, who was Speaker of the previous parliament.

"From the very first day, we are in favour of attending parliament session, but the situation created by the government is not conducive to attend it," he said, adding they have many things to counter the propaganda made by BNP leaders on the floor of the House.

AL has collected reports from across the country which showed that a total of 390 party leaders and activists were killed by BNP men since the coalition government took over and many had to go into hiding to escape arrest in 'false' cases.

Although the AL nominated candidates for five parliament seats vacated by President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina and senior AL leader Abdur Razzak, the party is not sure whether its candidates would be able to contest the by-polls amid government intervention.

A senior AL leader said their candidates have been asked to quit the polls race if they face any sort of intimidation in the by-elections scheduled for January 17.

The party is now preparing to convene a convention on "Crime against Humanity to focus on government sponsored atrocities and intensify the anti-government agitation."

On the other hand, the ruling coalition has been preparing to tackle the main opposition party

SI arrested

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Mohammad Kabir Hossain of DB police.

Later the DB team also recovered his service gun from his Y-15, Razia Sultana Road residence in Mohammadpur.

Tariqul was produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka yesterday with prayer for a five-day police remand. The defence lawyers submitted a petition seeking bail and cancellation of the remand prayer.

After hearing both sides, Magistrate Biman Bihari Barua rejected the bail petition and placed Tariqul on a one-day remand.

AL convention

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Institution of Engineers in the city.

Sheikh Hasina, also Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, will attend the convention as chief guest, Justice K M Sobhan, Convener of the National Preparatory Committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Justice Sobhan said his committee approached only progressive political parties, but none has yet confirmed participation. "We talked with different progressive political parties, but they are yet to give their consent".

Asked about BNP and its allies, he said, "We have not yet decided whether to invite BNP. But it is certain we will not invite any fundamentalist party."

Before formation of the National Preparatory Committee, the AL chief had dialogues with four left-leaning political parties with a call for co-sponsoring the convention to give it an all-party character.

The parties regretted to join AL in co-organising the convention, earlier press reports said.

K M Sobhan said, "We have almost finalised the list of panelists. They are now busy writing papers to be presented at the convention."

He however acknowledged that many people who were approached to become member of the national convention committee regretted to

politically and also by 'other means,' sources said.

The government, which fixed a 100-day target to publish a white paper on AL's corruption during its five-year rule, so far filed corruption cases against top AL leaders including its chief Sheikh Hasina. Some former MPs were arrested and later granted bail.

It also planned to convene a counter-convention on 'atrocities' on the then opposition activists during the AL rule.

The authorities have foiled two AL sponsored political programmes and besieged the AL central office during hartal hours on November 15 and January 9. Moreover, police baton-charged two former AL ministers at a peaceful sit-in programme on the latter hartal day.

Despite repeated attempts top BNP leaders and ministers Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Moudud Ahmed could not be contacted on Saturday night for their comments on the issues.

Bail prayers of 6 Natore AL leaders rejected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Six local leaders of Awami League (AL) arrested in the pre-dawn raids were sent to jail here yesterday, after they were produced before a magistrate's court that rejected their bail petitions.

The arrested are -- Habibur Rahman, agriculture affairs secretary of the district AL, Shariful Islam, Pakuar Diar UP chairman and upazila AL joint secretary, Sadekur Rahman, former president of the upazila BCL, Rabiul Islam Rubon, upazila Jubo League secretary, Abdus Salam, a UP member and Babu, a BCL leader.

They were taken into custody following a case filed on Sunday (January 13) for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on a BNP procession on April 4, 2001.

Bagatipara Union BNP President Mokbul Hossain filed the case against 30 local Awami League leaders and activists for attacking the procession.

Mokbul Hossain, explaining why he brought the matter to court after a lapse of nine months, said he did not dare to file any case during the period of the Awami League government.

Hearing the news, local leaders and activists of the party gathered on the court premises and demonstrated against the court's decision. The activists brought out a procession that paraded down the main roads of the town and held a brief rally in front of the party office, demanding unconditional release of Awami League leaders and withdrawal of the case.

Bush faints

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swallowing a pretzel," Tubb said. "I do not find any reason that this would happen again."

Bush, 55, suffered an abrasion on his left cheek the size of a half dollar and a bruise on his lower lip, apparently from falling onto the floor from a couch. Bush said he had been feeling under the weather Saturday and Sunday.

"He had not been feeling well the last couple of days," said Tubb, although Bush had exercised rigorously Saturday and had a lighter workout Sunday. Tubb said Bush has felt "a little off his game," as if he was coming down with a head cold.

Bush plans to travel to the Midwest on Monday as planned, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. The plan was for Tubb to first give the president a quick checkup to make sure there was no lingering effect from the fainting incident.

Tubb said the episode does not appear to be related to stress or extra work brought on by Bush's duties as commander in chief and

the war in Afghanistan. This is the first health scare for Bush as president.

SAFF meet

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had earlier warned Bangladesh to reinstate the elected committee by Jan 8 or face suspension.

"There is a lot of pressure mounting on Bangladesh now. So we're hopeful the government would reinstate the officials and the whole episode can be put behind us and the tournament will take place as planned," Thapa said.

Last month, the Bangladesh federation's president, SA Sultan, fired the body's elected executive committee and appointed a new one.

Sultan was appointed to his post by the new government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Sultan is a member of parliament for Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which won a landslide election victory in October.

DUTP gets snarled

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Dhaka's transport infrastructure and strengthen institutional capacity of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

After coming to office, the present government has decided to replace the DUTP's outgoing executive director with the former Roads and Highways Department (R & HD) chief engineer Mahtabuddin Ahmed. Ahmed is the local representative of VHV Netherlands and regularly attended negotiation meetings on behalf of the consultants with the government. Ahmed is also the local agent of a Chinese company, now constructing the Mahakhali fly-over, financed by the DUTP.

Well into its fourth year, the main components of the DUTP are yet to start. The WB has cancelled the Jatrabari fly-over project, but other major components including improvements of three inter-district bus terminals, development of 30 important intersections, redressing of 40-km roads, reassigning of all bus routes, developing parking facilities, installation of a modern traffic signaling system and institutional development of the DCC are still on.

The communications ministry, which is implementing about 20 per cent of the project mainly the fly-overs, is now showing increased interest in bringing about changes in the DUTP. State Minister for Communications Salauddin Ahmed said the government is aware of the

problems in the DUTP and would do everything to revamp the project.

Ashraful Islam, project director of the DUTP's Project Coordination Unit, said inexperience in handling such a mega project has landed them in problem. He said the biggest problem was maintaining a proper coordination among the six organisations involved in the project. Moreover, the project arrangement was quite complicated and the concept was unclear to the implementing agencies including the DCC, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Rajuk, the Bangladesh Roads and Transport Authority, the Department of Environment and the Roads and Highways Department. Among them, the DCC is implementing 70 per cent of the project.

"The DTCB was created for effective supervision of the DUTP, but it was not given any legal mandate. So, it failed to control other implementing agencies," said Islam.

An official of the WB also agreed with Islam. He added that the project wanted to achieve too many things at a time and 'inefficiency' was high at the monitoring level. The WB would emphasise strengthening the DTCB in the coming review meeting to make it more effective, said the official, asking not to be named.

Gynaecologists

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The unprecedented move kicked up a row among organisers and observers in Chittagong. But, the CJKS officials were hell-bent on letting the three lady doctors attend the particular medical need, if any, of the cricketers.

A few CJKS officials at a press conference yesterday defended their decision, saying 'gynaecologists are also doctors.' However, Dr Shahdat Hossain, member-secretary of the medical team, said there was no need for any gynaecologist in the medical panel.

"We actually needed doctors specialised in physiotherapy, orthopaedics, surgery and sports medicine in such team," he said.

"But the reason behind the unnecessary inclusion of the three gynaecologists is best known to the organisers. I only know that the lady doctors in question are very close to some influential CJKS officials," said Shahdat bitterly.

One of the gynaecologists is learnt to be the wife of Dostogir Chowdhury, chief co-ordinator of the Chittagong matches. Dostogir, also a vice-president of the CJKS, was not present at the press conference.

The Test match starts from January 16.

Changes in admn

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Ministry, has been made an OSD (Officer on Special Duty).

In a major decision, Brigadier General Zillur Rahman, who was director of Chittagong Medical College Hospital, has been given the new assignment of IG (Prison) under the Home Ministry. The post of CMCH director was filled by Brigadier General Shah-e-Alam.

Some transfers have also taken place among senior assistant secretaries. M Abu Taleb Mian has been transferred from Economic Relations Division to the Home Ministry, Shahadat Hossain Majumdar from Directorate of Primary and Mass Education to Industries Ministry and Ruhul Amin from Industries Ministry to the Establishment Ministry.

Senior assistant secretary A K M Saiful Islam Chowdhury, who was an OSD, has been posted to Food Ministry.

Meanwhile, more changes have been made at the field-level administration. Some officials have been called back to Dhaka while some others sent to different parts of the country mainly to join as ADCs.

Among the Dhaka-based officials receiving orders to join as additional deputy commissioners in

various districts, S M Monirul Islam has been sent to Faridpur, Mohammad Hanif to Brahmanbaria and Harunur Rashid Khan to Narayanganj.

UNO of Baliakandi upazila in Rajbari district Majibar Rahman has been made ADC of Habiganj. He will replace Pronobesh Chandra Majumdar whose job has been attached to the Establishment Ministry for new posting.

In another order, an ADC of Chandpur Shawkat Nabi was transferred to Liberation War Affairs Ministry while Sheikh Jasimuddin Ahmed, a senior assistant commissioner in Habiganj, to Directorate of Primary and Mass Education.

Tow ACs (Land) have been called back to Dhaka to join the Education Ministry as senior assistant secretaries. Of them, Sharif M Masud was at Sathia in Pabna while Nazrul Islam at Sitakunda in Chittagong.

Another order showed that Chapainawabganj district council secretary Makbul Hossain has been attached to the Establishment Ministry while Majibar Rahman, an ADC in Mymensingh and waiting to join the Cabinet Division has been made a district council secretary.

Free access of RMG

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They also visited projects run by BRAC on women and schools in some villages.

The Congressmen lauded Bangladesh's achievement in feeding its people, empowerment of women and their role in the garment industry.

They also appreciated the 'elimination' of the child labour from the garments industry. The Congressmen described all these achievements as examples for the others, especially the Muslim world.

Describing Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim nation, they said it has got rid of the label of a 'bottomless basket case', slapped by former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s and achieving successes in grain production and empowerment of the women. They said they are aware of the potential plight of the women if the garment exports slumped further.

Crowley said Bangladesh Caucus is going to grow up with the brightening of the country's prospect to US businessmen in terms of investment.

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