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Cabinet okays draft of Power Reforms Act 2002

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft Bangladesh Power Reforms Act 2002 which proposes formation of a four-member regulatory commission to take major decisions regarding reforms and development of the power sector.

The four members will be appointed for four years. The commission will take decisions regarding tariff and reforms in generation, transmission, and distribution of power.

The draft also proposes privatisation of the distribution system in phases. It proposes continuation of the on going process of corporatisation of power plants and turning more plants into Strategic Business Units (SBU).

The draft act is likely to be placed in the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

The cabinet also approved in

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Elections to 15 municipalities today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Elections to 15 pourasabhas (municipalities) in different parts of the country will be held today.

The municipalities are Nageshwari in Kurigram district, Bobaniganj in Rajshahi, Chuadanga Sadar, Muladi in Barisal, Lalmohon in Bhola, Sonargaon in Narayanganj, Boalmari in Faridpur, Akhaura in Brahmanbaria, Choumohani in Noakhali, Dagonbhuiyan and Parshuram in Feni, Bariyarahat and Rangunia in Chittagong, Moheshkhali in Cox's Bazar and Ramgarh in Khagrachhari district.

The Election Commission banned campaign in the municipalities from midnight Sunday.

The EC has completed all preparations to conduct the polls smoothly. It has assigned one official

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INSIDE TODAY

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Will Bangladesh become another Nigeria?

Column: Straight from the heart

Afsan Chowdhury

Culture 16

Dhaka greets Twentieth Century Girls

Call money rate shoots up on new BB order

CRR to be maintained with local currency

INAM AHMED

In a far-reaching budget balancing move, the central bank has asked the commercial banks to maintain their mandatory cash reserve ratio (CRR) with it in local currency instead of foreign currency.

The belt tightening measure yesterday caused a flurry of activities in the call money market as banks scrambled to borrow taka from each other and deposit the same with the Bangladesh Bank (BB). As a result, call money rate shot up to 28 per cent in place of the usual pre-Eid 12-14 per cent. The banking system needed at least an additional amount of around Tk 1800 crore to Tk 2000 crore on a single day.

The BB in a circular yesterday said commercial banks would no longer be allowed to show their foreign currency as the CRR.

The banks have to deposit 20 per cent of their total deposit with the BB as statutory reserve ratio (SRR) of which four per cent have to be maintained in cash as CRR and the rest in treasury bills or bonds. The central bank allowed the banks to maintain their CRR with foreign currency to let them have more access to fund.

The banks do not get any interests on CRR. But if they fail to maintain it, they have to pay penalty to the BB at a rate of three per cent over the bank rate.

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PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

An amorous proposition gone haywire: Dhaka Zoo's Liger hybrid project has been a huge failure as authorities have long tried unsuccessfully to crossbreed the two species. Caged together for seven years, the lion and the tigress have frequently turned on one another, often resulting in violent encounters.

Education in shambles

Experts cite four major reasons

STAR REPORT

Lack of proper motivation of students and guardians, absence of co-relation between education and employment are the major reasons for decline in the country's education standard.

Moreover, corruption in recruitment of teachers and poor quality of textbooks add to the deteriorating quality of education.

Leading educationists expressed this view when their attention was drawn to this unwellcome trend.

They suggested all out efforts to

improve the standard of education, particularly at primary level since it is the base of higher education, gearing up monitoring of academic activities and introducing quality textbooks and curriculum.

Noted educationist Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said primary education has long been neglected and attention was given to secondary and higher education. This amounted to ignoring the reality that without proper education at primary level, standard higher education is never possible.

He said the allocation for primary education is insufficient and most of it is spent on infrastructure and purposes other than on improvement of the quality of education.

A recent survey on primary education showed a bizarre state of primary education and underscored appropriate steps to overcome this.

Less than two per cent of the students completing five years of primary education 'acquired all the 27 competencies tested.' One per cent of the students in government schools, 0.9 per cent in private schools and six per cent in non-formal ones 'achieved the 27 competencies,' it said.

The survey titled 'State of Primary Education in Bangladesh,' conducted by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), found that students did better in 'those competencies which depended on recall and did not involve much thinking and reasoning.'

In 1992, a curriculum with 53 competencies was introduced at primary level in the country. The study examined achievement of competencies by students at the end of the primary stage.

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Six diplomats made secys

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Six senior career diplomats presently serving as ambassadors have been promoted to the rank of full secretary to the government yesterday, sources said.

They are, Humayun Akhtar Kamal, ambassador to China; KM Sarjit Hasan, ambassador to Russia; Jamil Majid, ambassador to Japan; Abdullah-Al-Hasan, high commissioner to Maldives; Motahar Hossain, ambassador to Jordan; and Ashfaqur Rahman, ambassador to Germany.

With the new promotions, the number of full secretaries in active service in the Foreign Service now stands at nine.

The other three full secretaries are Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, permanent representative to the UN, Muhammad Zamir, ambassador to Belgium, and Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Bir Bikram.

Petition against Hasina sent back to same division bench of HC

BSS, Dhaka

The chief justice yesterday sent back to the same division bench of the High Court the matter of contempt petition filed against Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina for disposal

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Freighters' strike spells trouble for traders

NAZRUL ISLAM & MORSHED ALI KHAN

An indefinite strike enforced since Sunday last by three freight operators associations is impeding the country's export-import businesses.

The strike is the fallout of a tug-of-war between freight handlers and luxury coach service providers over occupation of a piece of land near the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Kamlapur in the capital.

A hurried decision by the government to allocate six bighas of land to luxury coaches, currently in daytime operation for city commuters, has prompted the freight operators associations to enforce the strike.

In the last two days, the ICD saw a huddle of more than 1,000 containers at the terminal at Kamlapur and another 1,000 waiting at Chittagong port.

In the first two days into the strike, the government incurred a loss of Tk 2 crore, sources said.

The country's garment manufacturers are the worst hit by the ongoing strike over which the BGMEA expressed concern.

Chairman of Shippers' Council of Bangladesh Faruber Anwar yesterday expressed concern over the impediment to freight activities.

Faruber Anwar urged the Bangladesh Railway authorities and the Ministry of Communications to immediately end the deadlock and help the export-oriented industries. Freight handlers at a meeting last night urged the government to resolve the stand-off. If the government takes any repressive measures, the truckers will enforce a country-wide strike, they threatened.

The move to allocate the land to luxury buses came

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Signing of attendance registrar JS calls it 'disgraceful' for lawmakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The House yesterday strongly opposed the provision of signing of attendance registrars by lawmakers, calling it disgraceful for them.

The lawmakers were unanimous on scrapping the law which provides that a lawmaker would be entitled to daily allowance during a session only if he/she signs the attendance registrar.

The previous Awami League government amended the Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Privileges) Act providing for compulsory signing of the registrar when the BNP-led opposition was on a continuous boycott of parliament proceedings.

As the Treasury Bench members pleaded for a ruling from the Chair on the issue, Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui shared their sentiments but referred to the need for amending the relevant law.

He also expected a statement from Law Minister Moudud Ahmed on the issue.

Taking the floor, Moudud promised to communicate the sentiment of the House to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and to raise the matter to the cabinet.

Thanking the law minister, the deputy speaker said the cabinet can

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Close circuit TV in JS soon to tighten security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Close circuit television would be installed in the Jatiya Sangsad soon to tighten its security further, Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui informed the House yesterday.

Responding to a point of order, the deputy speaker also briefed the House about the recent security measures taken in the wake of attacks on parliaments in different countries including India and Fiji.

"We've banned car parking in the tunnel (outside the JS building), deployed additional security forces and provided the police personnel with automatic rifles," he said speaking of the new security arrangements.

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BRTA may defer deadline for three-wheelers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Following pressure from transport associations, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is considering allowing three-wheeler owners at least four more days to get fitness and other necessary stickers.

Earlier, the government had set February 18 as the deadline for getting fitness, route permit and tax token stickers for three-wheelers, failing which the vehicles would be seized.

Officials of the BRTA and the traffic department of the Dhaka

Metropolitan Police (DMP) however denied any pressure working behind the time extension.

Deputy Commissioner of the DMP's traffic division, south zone, Abu Musa Mohammad Fakhru Islam told The Daily Star that the sticker collection by three-wheeler owners was delayed due to strikes called by different associations of auto-rickshaw owners and employees.

According to him, police may start impounding three-wheelers without stickers from the 23rd or 24th of this month. Auto-rickshaw owners and employees observed a four-day

strike in the city on January 30.

Abdur Rob, assistant director of the BRTA, said the deadline for sticker collection may be extended by a few days.

Meanwhile, more than 4,000 three-wheeler owners have collected route permit stickers from the BRTA till yesterday, while 200 more have collected fitness stickers.

The number of auto-rickshaws registered with the BRTA since 1993 is more than 20,000 while that of tempos is over 11,000.

FIFA lifts ban on Bangladesh

AP, Zurich

World soccer's governing body, FIFA, said yesterday it had lifted a ban which barred Bangladesh from hosting or taking part in international soccer events.

Spokesman Nicolas Maingot said, however, that FIFA was still "following the situation carefully," with the "suspension lifted until the adoption of new statutes and the organisation of new elections, if deemed necessary."

"No deadline has been set, but we urge them to do it quite rapidly," Maingot told The Associated Press.

FIFA suspended Bangladesh last month for "government interference" after an official fired the Bangladesh Football Federation's elected executive committee -- a violation of FIFA rules.

Maingot said if Bangladesh soccer authorities wished to change the committee membership they could only do so by holding elections.

In December, the soccer federation's new president S A Sultan sacked the body's elected executive committee and appointed a new one. FIFA, in an emergency meeting, suspended Bangladesh after it failed to meet the Jan. 8 Deadline to reinstate the elected officers.

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

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