

Zimbabwe goes to most crucial polls in history

AP, Harare

Thousands of Zimbabweans formed long lines outside polling stations yesterday, some knitting and playing with their children while they waited to vote in the most crucial and competitive presidential elections in the southern African nation's history, pitting President Robert Mugabe against a trade unionist promising reform.

Following a campaign marred by political violence and intimidation, which human rights groups blame on the ruling party, opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai said he was pleased to see so many people voting.

"I'm very happy with the high turnout," Tsvangirai told reporters. He also urged people to be patient while they waited, believing that a large turnout would favour him.

Lines as long as 2 kilometers snaked around polling stations in Harare, the capital. Several restless voters tried to force their way into one polling station but were pushed back by police.

Queues were far longer than during parliamentary elections in June 2000, which Mugabe's party narrowly won. Mugabe has been in power since inde-

pendence from Britain in 1980 and has only in the last few years faced real dissent as the economy has collapsed.

Opposition officials blamed the government for the long lines, saying they had reduced the number of polling stations in urban areas where the opposition is known to have a large following.

Reflecting confusion over voter registration lists, Mugabe's name did not appear on the list at the polling station in a Harare township where he had planned to vote. Shortly before he arrived, his advance team was informed of the gaffe and he was whisked to another station, where his name was listed.

About 1,000 people were already in line at a small tented polling station in Mbare, outside of Harare, when polls opened. Several hundred had come in the middle of the night. When the station opened a few minutes late, the voters began chanting, "It's time. Time is up!"

"This election is all about food and jobs," said Newton Kuwana who had been in line since 4 am.

In what appeared to be a show of force, witnesses in Harare reported unusually large number of soldiers and military vehicles around the capital. Government officials declined to comment on the deployment.

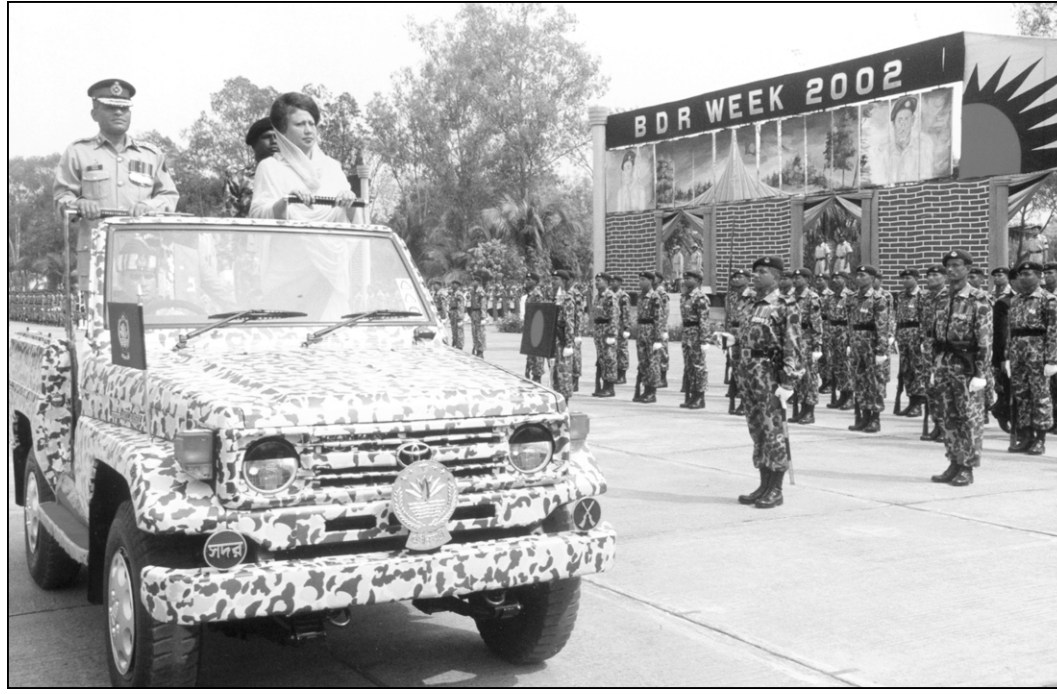
In the rural town of Chininga, 12 farmers were arrested and held on unspecified charges after helping election monitors reach polling stations, the Commercial Farmers Union said Saturday.

The election comes amid the country's worst economic crisis since 1980. Inflation is over 110 per cent, unemployment is 60 per cent and hundreds of thousands of people are going hungry.

The few pre-election polls reveal voters' fears with one poll reporting that 70 per cent of people questioned refused to say who they would vote for.

"That's my secret. I can't tell you," Ronnie Dube, a 48-year-old carpenter, said when asked how he would vote. "I want to vote for a good future."

The election is the biggest challenge to Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front Party since he led the country to independence.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia reviews a BDR parade at the Bangladesh Rifles Headquarters in the city yesterday on the occasion of BDR Week 2002.

PHOTO: PID

Govt to do its best to equip, modernise BDR: PM

UNB, Dhaka

The prime minister said the government will do its best to equip and modernise the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles.

Admiring the professional and sincere role of the force in maintaining law and order, she said, "It will help consolidate the forward march of democracy."

The prime minister was addressing the officers and jawans of BDR at a parade on the occasion of BDR Week-2002 at its headquarters in Peelkhan yesterday morning.

Khaleda reviewed the smartly turned-out parade commanded by Dhaka Sector Commander Colonel Hanif Iqbal. Ministers, MPs, chiefs of the three services and senior civil and military officials also witnessed the parade.

She gave away this year's gallantry awards, including Bangladesh Rifles Award 2002 to Lance Naik Mohammad Wahid Miah, Sepoy Mohammad Abdul Qadir and Sepoy Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, who laid down

their lives defending the frontiers of the country.

Wives of Wahid Miah and Abdul Qadir received the posthumous awards from the prime minister, while the father of Mahfuzur Rahman received his late son's award.

Five President's Rifles Awards 2002 were given to Havildar Mohammad Abdul Ghani, Lance Naik Mohammad Nurul Islam, Sepoy Mohammad Abu Bakar Siddique, Sepoy Mohammad Habibur Rahman and Sepoy S M Zahed-un-Nabi.

Earlier, on her arrival at the parade ground the prime minister was received by Minister for Home Affairs Altab Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Luftuzzaman Babar and Director General of BDR Maj Gen Razaqul Haider.

Addressing the parade, the prime minister said the BDR has always played a commendable and courageous role in performing their responsibilities.

She said the nation was proud of the border guards for their bravery in

maintaining the country's sovereignty and Padua and Boroibari. "It will remain an example for the future generation," she said.

Khaleda recalled the sacrifice of the members of BDR in 1971 when this force had to face the severe brunt of the occupation army on the night of March 25.

The prime minister paid respect to the 819 members of the then EPR who laid down their lives during the nine-month war of independence. She mentioned the supreme sacrifice of two Bir Shresthas, Lance Naik Noor Mohammad Sheikh and Lance Naik Munshi Abdur Rauf, who belonged to the EPR.

The prime minister assured them of the government's total support for any measures of the BDR to check smuggling.

Reassuring cooperation in building up a strong BDR force, she reminded that immediately after the present government came to power, necessary steps were taken to raise six more battalions and create organisational structure to suit the needs of time.

PDB plays with projects

FROM PAGE 1

were of proven and reliable design and the main equipment was of high quality. Besides, it ensured that the bidder had experience of working in unfamiliar conditions and under the laws of another country.

"Without two years' commercial operation experience of any power plant, reliability of the design as well as the main equipment of the power plant cannot be truly assessed," one source said.

In recent times the original bidding criterion has been followed while awarding installation work of all the new or under-construction power plants in the country, except one - the 100MW Baghabari Gas Turbine Power Plant, which was awarded to an Indian Company in 1999, sources said.

During the Awami League regime overseas-experience requirement was removed for the first time while awarding the project.

Talking about the Baghabari 100MW power plant, the PDB chairman said that it was an open tender and anybody could compete and that the Indian company offered the lowest price. "We are getting power from the plant at the cost of only 26 million dollar and the plant is performing wonderfully."

The PDB chairman observed that had overseas experience remained a qualification requirement, the numbers of bidders would not have been more than two or three. "We want quality product at a competitive price. The criterion was changed so that more company can participate and we can get quality product."

While floating two new tenders and a second re-tender for the Tongi plant last year, this criterion was changed again which allowed the bidders without overseas experi-

ence with continuous commercial operation for two years to compete.

Soon after the BNP government took over, the change in qualification criterion was changed and the original qualification criterion was restored.

But, "surprisingly" on February 5 this year the PDB again changed the qualification criterion and new amendments were made in all the three international tenders, sources said. As per the new amendment the strict qualification criterion would be relaxed for bidders who have installed and commissioned one 100MW or higher capacity power plant in Bangladesh.

The new criteria enables the Indian company to bid for the tenders as it has installed and commissioned the 100MW Baghabari power plant.

In the meantime, the PDB made another amendment of the criterion on February 14 and the amended criterion was similar to the one offered during the tenure of the caretaker government.

Sources said final changes were made fearing possible controversy, as the amendment made on February 5 was a clear indication of a certain quarter's efforts to award the work to a particular company.

Asked why there have been several changes to the criterion, the PDB chairman said that soon after the BNP government had taken over, it thought that the previous criterion should be in place as it was a practice for long.

Later the government might have thought that it should not interfere in the process as the tender had already been floated. This might be the reason for which the third amendment was made, he said.

Outlaws

FROM PAGE 12

police charging powerful handbombs.

Some of the attackers were also injured, said a police official quoting eyewitnesses.

Two hand-bombs smeared with blood were recovered from the spot.

Local people said the attackers who came to the custom ghat from Rupsha east by engine boat shouted slogans in the name of BPCP as they left.

Tapashi

FROM PAGE 12

The court also stayed the dismissal order.

A division bench comprising Justice M A Matin and Justice Marzi Ul-Haque passed the order.

Dr Kamal Hossain moved the petition on behalf of the petitioner while Deputy Attorney General Barrister Tariq Ul-Hakim stood on behalf of the state.

Glass factory

FROM PAGE 12

At one stage, the gang demanded a toll of Tk 10 lakh. In a bid to damage the two main machines at the factory worth about Tk 2 crore, they exploded hand bombs on it.

Some sources said the attackers are mastaans sheltered by local BNP leaders.

The factory remained closed after the incident. Its owner could not be contacted.

Siddhirganj police said 'one Abdul Awal' lodged a case with Fatullah thana in connection with the incident. They also said they did not know 'political identity' of the attackers.

None was arrested till the filing of this report last night.

Sharon drops key demand

FROM PAGE 12

forces killed at least 38 Palestinians in raids after a lone Palestinian attacker killed five people at the Atzmona Jewish settlement in Gaza.

With US, Arab and international pressure mounting for an end to the bloodletting, Sharon on Friday dumped his insistence on seven days of absolute calm before putting in motion a ceasefire deal brokered last year by CIA director George Tenet.

"Negotiations for a ceasefire will be under fire," Sharon told Israeli television.

He coupled the turnaround with a renewed pledge to hit the Palestinians "with all our might" if attacks on Israelis continued, but Palestinian officials and Israeli critics said the shift amounted to an admission of failure.

Sharon also again insisted that there could be no negotiations on a peace settlement until after violence stopped.

US President George W Bush announced on Thursday that he was sending Middle East envoy Anthony Zinni back to the region next week to revive dormant US peacemaking efforts.

The former Marine general's mission, his third, follows a ferocious upsurge in fighting after Sharon vowed on Monday to "beat" the Palestinians until they sued for peace.

US shift

The spiral of strike and counter-strike has alarmed Washington as

and said they feared he was now trying to renegotiate the Tenet deal. They said the onus was on Sharon to halt his military offensive.

"Sharon's government is required first of all to stop these massacres against our people in Gaza and the West Bank because statements alone are worthless," Nabil Abu Rdainah, an adviser to Arafat, told Reuters.

Washington sees it as a precursor to a return to peace negotiations and a step on the way to a wider Saudi proposal for Arab-Israeli peace that foreign ministers of the Arab League were due to consider in Cairo this weekend.

Israeli government spokesman Arie Melki denied Sharon's shift on the Tenet plan was an about-face, saying Israel was simply "going the extra mile" to facilitate Zinni's mission.

A source close to Sharon said the switch would put pressure on Arafat, whom Israel accuses of failing to control gunmen and bombers, to meet his obligations under the plan.

"We're saying we'll talk to you under fire, but if you attack we'll give you so much fire that you'll beg for us to stop," the source said.

Aides to Arafat called Sharon's new position an admission of the failure of his tough security policies

3 murders

FROM PAGE 1

(DMCH) morgue for autopsy report.

Sources said the woman might have been slain after being raped at some time Friday night.

Meanwhile, Mohammadpur police recovered body of vegetable vendor Motaleb Hossain, son of Amir Hossain, from a slum near the TB Hospital in Agargaon yesterday morning.

A resident of village Bassatra under Savar thana, the victim had been missing since March 6. Some people at the slum found his body in a shanty at about 9:30am and informed the police. The body bearing marks of bullet and stab injuries was sent to the DMCH morgue.

Police suspected that miscreants had taken Motaleb to the slum Friday night and killed him. They however have no clue to the killing.

Father of the victim has filed a murder case with the Mohammadpur Police Station.

50 rape incidents

FROM PAGE 12

Magura and one in Chuadanga, Narail and Meherpur each during the period.

Failing to get justice and security, some victims tried to commit suicide out of desperation.

On February 24, Shoiubar Rahman, a student of Islamic University, allegedly raped a minor girl. A resident of Khajura village under Jhenidah Sadar upazila, the girl threatened to kill herself by pouring petrol on her body, when police refused to arrest the rapist.

A Hindu housewife was raped in front of her school-going son and daughter at her house in Beel Khalia village under Ashashuni upazila on the night of February 4.

Threatened by the rapists, allegedly cadres of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the housewife made two attempts to commit suicide.

The woman told Sathkira reporters that police refused to record her case, which encouraged the rapists to issue further rape threats on her.

Karim, who allegedly raped a minor girl at a house at Ashashuni

Sadar upazila, has been arrested. But his associates are intimidating her parents into withdrawing the case.

The alleged BNP cadre, Gokul Das, 28, who raped a dumb girl on the night of February 15 in Dhulgaram village under Abhoynagar thana, is yet to be arrested.

Deprived of necessary healthcare facilities, the victim is battling for her life.

Police drove the persons, who wanted to file a case, out of the police station.

On February 17, an advocate raped a mentally retarded woman thrice at Ghosepara under Sathkira Sadar thana.

The advocate is still at large, while the victim has been missing since the incident.

Police did not arrest the advocates despite demand for his arrest by the local people and leaders of the Sathkira Human Rights Commission, the sources said.

Harun murder

FROM PAGE 1

what PBCP has said in the fax message. We can not sidetrack PBCP at this stage of investigation" he said without clearly saying whether he suspects involvement of PBCP in the murder.

The killers and the planners are now out of Khulna district. Hunt for them is going on in Jhenidah and Goplaganj districts. They are hiding somewhere in the two districts, said another police officer specially assigned to help the investigation.

The OC of Khalishpur thana said, "Of course, we have no doubt that Aslam, Humayun Kabir and Sohel were not involved in the murder". The three were arrested on Sunday last and questioned for five days in remand.

Involvement of vested groups is not also being ruled out. Harun used to write not only against terrorists, but also against others involved in drug trafficking and financial scandals that caused colossal loss of revenue and foreign exchange earning to government, sources in Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) said.

Slum fires

FROM PAGE 12

He also said DESA's drive to snap illegal lines would be intensified to stop illegal use of electricity.

Incidents of fire in the city are increasing with the onset of dry session. Four incidents of fire, three of those in slums in only five days, left one person burnt alive and several others injured. Thousands of poor people lost everything and are now living under the open sky. The fire at Islambagh slum was the most devastating one with about 4,000 tin-shed shanties, a number of shops, residential buildings and factories gutted.

Many city dwellers suggested setting up more fire service stations and properly equipping those with vehicles and modern devices. The number of such stations did not increase despite quick rise of city population in the last 30 years, they pointed out.

There are now 11 fire stations in the city and these are at Postagola, Sadarghat, Palashi, Ramna, Demra, Mohammadpur, Kurmitola, Mirpur, Tejaon, Khilgaon and Lalbagh.

Opposition sponsoring crimes

FROM PAGE 1

party men including an MP were arrested on criminal charges. "The governing party does not resort to terrorism and it will not be allowed to do so," she said.

The prime minister claimed her government has improved law and order soon after coming to office over five months ago and said incidents of crimes rose only recently due to patronisation of the opposition. She ruled out deployment of army to check growing acts of crimes which, according to her, are "isolated incidents".

Contradicting a reporter's observation that the law and order was getting worse, she said it was the worst during the AL rule.

The PM lauded the police saying "they have done a good job as there was no backlash in the country of the communal violence in India".

"The minorities in the country are safe because of our timely action," she said, blaming the opposition for attempting to cash in on the minority

issue.

Criticising the Indian authorities, she commented had they taken preventive measures casualties in the communal riot could have been avoided. "But we condemn and regret the violence."

Khaleda, also the leader of the house, once again asked the boycotting opposition to join the parliament and discuss whatever they may wish. "I made such calls earlier, too, and I repeat it again. But what else can be done?" she wondered while asked if her party would take any effective move to bring the main opposition Awami League to the parliament.

She told the news conference that a committee was working on the issue of women's reserved seats in the parliament - one of her election pledges - and assured of timely steps.

She also asked the AL to raise its demand for the party's stakes in the parliamentary standing committees to be formed.

Khaleda dismissed reports that security to the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina has been patched up. "She has been given enough security. Additional forces have been deployed at her residence to tighten her security, not to spy on her."

She referred to the private member's bill placed in the parliament seeking repeal of the law on preservation and display of portrait of the Father of the Nation as she was asked if her government would scrap the law. "Let's see what the House decides..."

To a question, the prime minister told journalists that situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was normal.

Finance and Planning Minister M. Saifur Rahman, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan, among others, attended the press conference.

Earlier, the PM issued a statement about her role in the Commonwealth summit.

UP wants army to control Hindu zealots in Ayodhya

AFP, New Delhi

The government of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has asked for the deployment of army troops to control Hindu activists planning to launch the construction of a temple on the site of the razed Ayodhya mosque.

"This morning we have received a written request from the Uttar Pradesh administration for deployment of the army in Faizabad," Defence Minister George Fernandes said yesterday at a function for naval officers.

"For the past few days we were getting telephonic requests from Faizabad district administration. But since last night the requests have become intense," he added.

Hindu zealots have been gathering in Faizabad and its adjacent twin city of Ayodhya for the past two weeks in anticipation of a March 15 religious ceremony being planned to mark the start of construction work on the temple.

The mosque on the site was

pulled down by thousands of Hindu fanatics in 1992, triggering violent communal clashes which left 2,000 people dead.

The appeal for the deployment of the army follows recent Hindu-Muslim clashes in Gujarat state in which around 700 people died. That violence was triggered after a train carrying Hindu activists from Ayodhya was attacked by a mob.

District authorities have cut off Ayodhya and Faizabad by restricting rail and road traffic to prevent activists from arriving in the two cities.

The federal government however indicated on Friday that it would ease travel restrictions to the two cities.

Muslim leaders are due to meet in Delhi on today to discuss whether Hindus should be allowed to conduct a "symbolic religious ceremony" near the disputed site on March 15.

Ctg court attacked

FROM PAGE 1

expired in 1994.

The Appellate Division of the High Court in a recent judgement ordered holding of the election by March 16.

Yesterday, the labour court was hearing a case on misappropriation of Tk 3 crore, filed against some office bearers of the CCHSU.

About half an hour after the hearing began, Zebal group came in trucks and attacked the court.

Eighteen of the arrested were identified as Zebal Haq, Md Ayub Ali, Mohiuddin, Belaluddin, Md Hossain, Siddiq, Babul, Ilyas, Abu Taher, Yusuf, Dulal, Anwar, Abdul Malek, Ezahar Haq, Abdul Monaf, Ferdous, Md Musa and Abdur Rahman.

Immediately after the arrested were taken to Panchlaish thana, some local BNP leaders accompanied by a large number of activists went there.

The activists were seen waiting outside as the leaders including MA Sabur, joint-secretary of city BNP, Anwar Hossain and MA Gafur, General Secretary and organizing secretary of divisional Sramik Dal respectively talked with the officer-in-charge (OC). Sources said the BNP leaders asked the OC not to take any case in connection with the incident.

However, a case was filed against some 140 people, 18 of them named in the FIR.

Court Registrar Jahangir Alam filed the case under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

After the incident, the perplexed judge told newsmen, "I can't imagine what could have been my fate, if I had not any place to take shelter".

Mahima

FROM PAGE 12

The court fixed March 24 as the next date for hearing the suicide case.

Schoolgirl Mahima of Kanthalbaria village in Puthia thana in the district was kidnapped allegedly by Farid, Faruk, Selim and Iqbal Hossain Uzzal on February 15 and gang-raped. She committed suicide on February 19. All the rapists are allegedly activists of BNP.

Following the incident, police recorded two cases and submitted charge sheet against 12 persons in both the cases within 13 days.

The four rapists were charged under Section 79(3)/10(2) of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act and the eight others under Sections 306 and 201 of the Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC).

Meanwhile, the magistrate court yesterday rejected bail prayers of Iqbal Hossain Uzzal, Mosarrif Hossain Musa (Uzzal's father), Abdul Khaleq and Jahangir Hossain (maternal uncle of Selim).

All the six arrested accused confessed their guilt.

Bahauddin Nasim

FROM PAGE 1

date and unconditional release of Nasim. They alleged physical and inhuman torture on Nasim in custody since he was arrested from Zia International Airport on way to USA in the early hours of Feb 28.

He was arrested on charge of possessing excess foreign currency and also in connection with the case of attacking the motorcade of Khaleda Zia in Madanipur last year.

Azad complained that "even the family members of Bahauddin Nasim were not allowed to meet him," and apprehended that he was badly tortured. "The attitude of the government has proved that Nasim is not in a condition to meet anyone."

The AL leader said Nasim should immediately be taken to hospital for necessary treatment.

The government also violated order of the court by directly sending him to jail instead of producing before court, Azad said and warned that the government would be wholly responsible if anything bad happened to Nasim.

The AL leader also urged the Amnesty International, diplomats, human rights bodies to inquire about Bahauddin Nasim and speak out against inhumanity.

Party general secretary Zillur Rahman said the government is not only unleashing terrorism on Awami League leaders and workers across the country but also continuing torture on them by arresting and sending them to jail.

"This is inhuman and against democratic norms," he said demanding justice.

Zillur said Bahauddin Nasim as a close aide of Sheikh Hasina used to take care of her security. "By arrest-

ing Nasim, Sheikh Hasina's security has been endangered," he observed.

Suranjit Sengupta also spoke at the briefing.

Party sources said the delegation went to jail gate where Jail Super Ammanulah Sarder talked to the members but denied them permission to meet Nasim. The delegation waited for about an hour.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 12

the Awami League.

She also suggested that legal aid committees be formed in each district to extend legal support to the tortured Awami League leaders and workers and the tortured people as well.

Hasina said the government utterly failed in every sector; the economy is going down, law and order deteriorating and prices of essentials shot up.

Referring to the win of Awami League by a landslide in the Mymensingh Bar elections held on February 27, she said the people already turned round.

Newly-elected bar leaders, including President Advocate Mostafa M A Matin and General Secretary Advocate Abdul Hasem, former MP Jobaed Ali and Mymensingh Municipal Chairman Mahamud Al-Noor Tareq also addressed the meeting. Awami League leaders Syed Ahmed, Altab Hossain Golondaz MP and former MP Moslemuddin and Shamsul Huq were present.

Dhaka to seek \$ 2b

FROM PAGE 1

poverty, projection of overall economic situation, macro-economic management, reform programmes and good governance related issues were explained in the memorandum, they said.

However, the sources added, the quantum of aid will largely depend on poverty alleviation, good governance and efficiency of project selection and implementation.

The memorandum depicted a sluggish macro-economic situation in 2000-01 financial year, pinpointing poor foreign exchange reserve and fiscal deficit, sources said.

Meanwhile, officials said the crucial energy sector issue is likely to dominate the Paris meeting.

"We will place at the meeting energy and power projects included in the first year of the sixth Five-year Plan," State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain told UNB.

"We will also place the achievements in the first four months of the present government", he said and

hoped donors would appreciate the measures creating a field for private sector investment.

The minister mentioned the various reform programmes including planned pricing policies and regulatory bodies both for energy and power sectors.

Asked about overall basis that could be considered as the weakest point from Bangladesh side, he said "that might be one thing - delayed measures for various reform programmes. But we have taken drastic measures to remove the obstacles."

The meeting also set the internal wheat procurement target and the price of procurement, which were, however, not divulged in the official press release.

Besides, the meeting approved draft of the Money Laundering Prevention Bill to be introduced in parliament soon.

Ministers and state ministers attended the meeting.