

Protests swell in France as Le Pen vows victory

AFP, Paris

Protests swelled in France yesterday as far-right challenger Jean-Marie Le Pen began campaigning against incumbent conservative Jacques Chirac for next months presidential run-off, insisting he stood a strong chance of winning.

Thousands of high school students took to the streets in the cities of Montpellier, Le Havre, Rouen, Montauban and Toulon in a repeat of the vociferous protests Monday against Le Pen's weekend electoral breakthrough.

The 73-year-old head of the anti-immigration National Front (FN) party stunned France when he won 16.86 per cent of the vote in the first round of the presidential race, qualifying for the run-off against President Chirac on May 5.

His unprecedented triumph - which forced Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin out of the election - was condemned across the political spectrum, and has provoked a nationwide series of protests, some of which have ended in violence.

In the Bastille quarter of central Paris overnight Monday 14 people were taken into detention after riot police confronted a group of protesters who threw firebombs and bottles and smashed shop windows. Police said 13 officers were slightly hurt in the clashes.

Le Pen was in ebullient form yesterday, challenging Chirac to a face-to-face television debate and refusing to accept the opinion polls that show he lags behind the president by around 77 per cent to 23.

"I can be elected," he told RTL radio. "I am counting on the French people. I am the candidate of the people against the candidate of the system...."

I am counting on the millions of French people who think that things are not going well."

The FN leader also repeated his pledge to restore the French franc and take France out of the "Europe of Maastricht", which he said was an infringement on French sovereignty and made impossible the reforms the country needs.

Procession fired on: 2 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were bullet-hit when unidentified gang indiscriminately fired on a procession at Ring Road in the city's Dhanmondi area last night.

Sirajul Islam, a DCC commissioner candidate of the four-party alliance of ward 50, came under attack when the procession he was leading reached Ring Road at about 9:30pm.

Delware Hossain and Mohammad Helal were injured by bullets. They were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Local people said police picked up one person for his alleged involvement in the shoot-out.

Gujarat violence

FROM PAGE 12

removal of Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP has rejected Modi's removal and given him a clean chit.

But the main opposition Congress, the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party, headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav, had insisted on a discussion under rule 184 contending the killing of more than 800 people in Gujarat violence could be dismissed as a subject concerning only a state.

Giving his ruling yesterday, Sayeed told reporters that violence in Gujarat could not be viewed only as a concern of the state.

The motion, which will now be discussed in Lok Sabha, says, "That this house expresses its grave concern over the failure of the administration in ensuring the security of minority community in various parts of the country, especially in Gujarat, and urges upon the government to take effective steps to restore confidence of the minority communities and to protect them."

The BJP said it had accepted Sayeed's ruling even if it did not agree with what he said. The Congress predictably welcomed

the deputy speaker's decision to conduct the discussion under rule 184.

Ambika Soni, political secretary to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, said, "There are cases of violence in Gujarat everyday. Relief is not reaching the people and there are diseases in relief camps where violence victims are sheltered."

A solution to the impasse in parliament over the Gujarat issue was necessary in view of the fact that the general budget is yet to be passed. The business advisory committee will now decide the date and duration of the discussion on Gujarat.

What remains to be seen is whether BJP allies like the TDP, Trinamool Congress, led by Mamata Banerjee, Janata Dal (United) and Lok Janashakti Party vote for the motion or not.

While these parties have stuck to their demand for removal of Modi as the Gujarat chief minister and attacked his handling of violence in the state, the crucial question remains whether they will embarrass the Vajpayee government by voting for the motion.

Monk murder

FROM PAGE 12

The locals suspect that there is a different motive other than greed for land and money. The assailants ransacked the monk's room but left some important documents untouched, they said.

Ganojyoti had good relations with 47 foreign organisations that promised financial help for the orphanage. Recently, he returned home from Japan.

The monk received US\$ 11,400 in 'bishop's funds' from a London-based organisation on April 18, sources said.

The local people alleged that the case filed in this connection by Ganojyoti's brother Sulal Barua was an arranged one. Sulal was forced to sign a 'prepared' FIR, they said. "If this sounds untrue, then why should Sulal have marks of torture on the body?"

The killing sent shockwaves among followers and Buddhist devotees, relatives, teachers and orphans of the orphanage.

His death has also created a

vacuum in the administration of the orphanage home to around 100 orphans, 14 teachers and other employees as he, the principal of the temple and founder director of the orphanage, left behind no trustee.

Dulal Barua was renamed Reverend Ganojyoti Mohashthobir after he attained the post of cleric 16 years ago. The monk founded the monastery on his own land with the financial assistance of foreign countries, including the Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan. Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, now in London, has condemned the killing of the Buddhist monk.

In a protest statement yesterday, she said that once again it proved that there was no security of life under the rule of the 'fascist, corrupt, and killer' government.

Hasina conveyed her sympathy to the Buddhists and urged people to build resistance to the BNP-Jamaat government.

Commissioners

FROM PAGE 1

Shahid, who was arrested from his Satish Sarkar Road residence on February 13, is now awaiting trial in Dhaka Central Jail. He is contesting the DCC polls as an independent candidate from ward No. 83.

Shahid is facing charges for the murder of Azizur Rahman Khokon in Sutrapur on January 25 and BNP leader Habibur Rahman Mandal in front of his residence at Chandra Mahan Bashak Lane on August 20, 2000.

Police are also investigating whether he had hands in the double murder in Gandaria Rifle Club on June 19 last year. Shahid might face charges for his 'masterminding' the killing of another local young man, Ahmed Hossain Suman, 23, on February 9, 2000.

Ward Commissioner Habibur Rahman Mizan of Mohammadpur and Lalmatia area was implicated in several cases including one for murder.

Sadek Khan, a commissioner in Rayerbazar, allegedly grabbed acres of low-lying land, managed hefty allocations from the DCC and constructed roads through the plots

and went on to name those roads after him and his family members.

In Lalbagh, charges have been pressed against Ward Commissioner Haji Mohammad Selim in the BNP leader Shamsul Haque Shanti murder case. Seven cases against Selim are pending with Ramna, Lalbagh and Fatullah police stations. He is facing charges for abduction, harassment of women, attempt to murder and illegal trespassing in those cases.

He allegedly runs an armed gang and committed acts of hooliganism in different areas of the city.

Gunmen shot dead Shawkat Ali Mister, commissioner of ward No. 12, in front of his residence at Ahmednagar Paikpara in Mirpur on August 25 last year following a brawl over sharing the proceeds from a school.

Sources said Mister, who was loyal to the ruling BNP, was killed by his rivals as he was preparing to run for tomorrow's DCC election from the same ward. He was allegedly involved in drug peddling in the Mirpur area.

Ad-interim bail for Dipu Chy

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday granted ad-interim bail to Sajedul Islam alias Dipu Chowdhury, accused in a criminal case.

Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa passed the order upon a bond of Tk 30,000 with guarantors.

In its order, the court said that the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case could not submit the report regarding involvement in the case against the accused in the last six months. So, the bail petition is granted.

However, Dipu, son of former state minister for shipping Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya would not be released from the Dhaka Central Jail as his bail petition in another criminal case was rejected on March 7.

The defence lawyers Advocate Quamrul Islam and Khorshed Alam Bachchu submitted a criminal appeal on March 31, seeking bail from the Sessions Judge's Court after the rejection order of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka. Later, the judge heard the appeal on Monday and gave the order yesterday.

The CMM's Court on March 18 rejected the bail petition of Dipu.

It was alleged that Dipu and 8 others entered the Kite Car Repairing Servicing Motors in the city's Uttara area and threatened the owner of it on March 1 last year and later on July 22 they took away parts of private car, worth about Tk 20 lakh.

Young man

FROM PAGE 12

the spot at about 11:45 am yesterday and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The reason behind the killing could not be known immediately.

Some sources in the area claimed that Babul had informed police about Phensidyl racket in the area.

The victim's wife, Kalpana, filed a case with Sabujbagh police accusing three persons -- Manik, Rubel and Shahar Ali-- for killing her husband.

Sabujbagh police arrested Manik and a woman -- Saleha -- in connection with the incident.

CIH virus

FROM PAGE 12

The BCC has advised computer users in the country to keep a back up of all important files before using the computer on this day.

The virus can also be checked by the latest anti-virus software and the BCC called upon the computer users to contact its web site www.bccbd.org for help. Users can also dial 8623467, 8631331 and 8622082 for information about the virus.

Shihab murder

FROM PAGE 12

absentia, the order said.

The court order was published in the Daily Sangbad yesterday.

Detective Branch Inspector Nazrul Islam, Investigation Officer (IO) of the case submitted a charge sheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka on April 18 against six people.

The accused are -- Foisal Hossain Liton, Abu Syed, Faisal Sharif Raju, Mahbubul Haq Rubel, Imran Hossain Sabuj and Mohammad Nasim Sheikh. Of them, Liton and Syed were arrested and detained in the Dhaka Central Jail.

Liton and Syed gave confessional statements before a magistrate disclosing names of other accused Raju, Rubel, Sabuj and Nasim.

Shihab, 13, a student of Class Seven of Motijheel Model High School, was abducted from in front of his school on February 7. Later, he was killed as he recognised one of the abductors.

Harun murder

FROM PAGE 12

a description to DB interrogators how the murder was planned and committed.

He also named the PBCP armed cadre who fired shot at Harun's chest killing him on the spot at Muigunni at 7-30 pm on March 2. Cadres were deployed at eight places from Deana village up to Dainik Purbanchal office to kill the journalist at any available opportunity. Baby told DB officials who recorded his statement under Section 161.

But the prime accused in Harun murder case staged a high drama on Monday, stunning the magistrate and police officials who are jointly investigating the case.

The magistrate could not record statement under Section 164, said Inspector Shibli Noman. Noman refuted allegation of doing any "excess" during interrogation.

On Monday, Baby's mother Fatema Begum submitted a petition before the CMM's court alleging physical torture of his son.

She said Baby was not in Khulna on the day of Harun's murder. He was staying elsewhere for the last five years after the murder of her eldest son Khokon (Tiger Khokon) on November 29, 1997, she said.

"On April 25, 1998, my fourth son Jamil was murdered. My two sons were murdered at the instigation of a leader of a outlawed party (BPC) and they are again trying to implicate Baby in Harun murder case after failing in several attempts to kill him", Fatema stated in her petition.

The CMM, after receiving Fatema Begum's petition, ordered the authorities concerned to arrange proper medical treatment of Baby if required. He was then lodged in Khulna district jail.



Hands folded, students and teachers of the Hingala Hoara Puyan Buddha Bihar in Raozan pray before the portrait of Buddhist monk Ganojyoti Mohashthobir, slain on Monday. (Story on Page 12)

Khaleda: Gas export

From Page 1

Centre, the prime minister blasted the main opposition for 'tarnishing' the image of the country abroad and said the party is engaged in a campaign to project Bangladesh as a Taliban state.

"This unholly campaign will affect Bangladesh and its people abroad. This will obstruct our students from getting foreign scholarships, hamper manpower export, and dent the image of the country," she said and called upon the opposition to come to the parliament to voice its views.

Khaleda also regretted newspaper reports on various issues, particularly on crimes and repression on women. She said the government probed a number of reported incidents, but found these exaggerate and false.

"I will not say that incidents of crime and repression on women are not happening, but I can vouch that such events have come down in last six months compared to the previous regime. I am still not happy with the current situation, but I am confident that my government would be able to check crime gradually," she added.

Referring to the communal violence in the Indian state of Gujarat, she said the government, with the support of the people, has successfully checked all provocation.

Criticising the role of newspapers, she said "I do not find the newspapers playing a responsible role; the press lack responsibility. The media are blowing up some issues in a way as if these events never happened in the past."

She hoped that the media would

play a more 'responsible role' for the 'greater interest' of the country and its people.

Khaleda said the AL government patronised criminals, indiscriminately issued licences for arms and allowed its party men to possess illegal weapons.

"We would not be able to eliminate crime overnight because of previous state backing for criminals. We are proceeding in a planned way to check crime."

In this context, she said crimes in violence-prone Barisal, Feni, Narayanganj, Laxmipur and other areas have been reduced drastically. She also said the government has already brought about changes in the police administration and taken punitive measures against corrupt cops. More changes are underway, she mentioned.

However, she said the police are poorly treated as they have no proper training and facility. They are also provided with poor quality food and suffer from shortage of personnel and vehicles.

Election to the local bodies in time would improve the law and order situation and reduce crime, she said. The elected representatives would then take care of their respective areas to contain violence.

She said the city corporation polls of Sylhet and Barisal and upazila polls would be held after the elections to the four metropolises Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna. After completion of all elections, she said the elected representatives would be given the responsibility to curb crime.

About electricity crisis, she said

maintenance works in the power sector were not initiated in last five years and many projects were taken up solely to rip off money by the previous ruling party.

She said the government has taken some effective steps to improve the power situation, but said it would take some time to make a difference.

On elections to women's seats in the parliament, the prime minister said although the women organisations have long been demanding direct elections, none of them came up with any modality.

She said the women leaders belonging to the BNP who are contesting the city corporation polls have informed her of the difficulties they are facing in campaigns.

"I personally feel that it is not possible for a woman to cover three wards. It is very tough," she said, adding, "We will soon take a decision on the women's seats in the parliament".

About formation of parliamentary standing committees, she said these are almost finalised and will soon be formed through discussions with the speaker and the chief whip.

She said the government will soon appoint a spokesperson who will hold regular briefings on major events.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Political Secretaries to the Prime Minister Haris Chowdhury and Mosaddek Ali were present during the discussion.

Hanif's shenanigans

FROM PAGE 1

Some of the most scandal-addled land grabbing actually happened in the space of last eight years when Hanif illegally allocated playgrounds, footpaths, roads and designated car parks for commercial ventures in exchange for money. For instance, residents of Mohammadpur helplessly watched in 1999 how half of the Shaheed Park, a rare playground in the area, vanished into a mosque-cum-shopping centre.

Mr Mayor's endeavours another sneaky deal was frustrated when he allocated a green space in front of the Shishu Park to build a market. In the face of flak from the press, the construction work was stopped by a court order. The half-finished structure still stands as a testimony to the mayor's wrack on the city landscape.

Hanif has been deft in using his so-called election pledges to deface the city, the pledges the city dwellers did not own. He once released

about Tk 3 lakh from the public coffer to fence off a large chunk of public land in the city's Osmany Uddyan. His excuse -- the land was needed to fulfil his election pledge to rehabilitate street hawkers. Again, public outcry snubbed his attempt to grab the park.

Hanif could not have bothered less about his miserable failure in finding a solution to the garbage problem in Karwan Bazar. This track record did not stop him from embarking on allocating footpaths, a designated car park and a public thoroughfare 'temporarily' to build markets and shops. Nobody in the Nagar Bhaban knew what was Hanif's legal cover for the act. A source in the Nagar Bhaban said such allocations are totally illegal because the lands do not belong to the DCC.

In shovelling off the city's 3,500 tons of daily wastes, Hanif's efforts were restricted to sealing deals with foreign companies to import containers and vehicles. He could not

have cared less that actually not even 40 per cent of the daily wastes are cleaned. In many areas of the city, taxpayers lack access to any municipal facilities.

The myopic vision of the mayor to manage the city affairs was soon telling upon the Nagar Bhaban's health as well. Despite having huge land assets and money-spinning resources, the DCC is now teetering on the verge of bankruptcy. Over the last few months the DCC has been unable to buy insecticides for its mosquito eradication programme, leaving the citizens in the danger of dengue infection and malaria.

That Hanif failed in his affairs now poses a new challenge the new mayor will have to mount, Nagar Bhaban officials and citizens feel. The city is in dire need of a planner and an organiser; not a mere someone who only looks for windfalls through deals to the neglect of a liveable environ.

Election Campaign ends

FROM PAGE 1

came into effect from midnight yesterday, which will continue till midnight tomorrow.

In this period, there will also be a ban on carrying of licensed firearms and explosives.

However, the authorities were still in a fix whether to impose a ban on cellular mobile networks in the three cities.

Amidst tight security and widespread fear of violence, low turnout is expected in tomorrow's long overdue elections to the Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi city corporations, having nearly three million voters.

A 33,000-strong security blanket comprising members of the army, paramilitary BDR, police and Ansar continued patrolling streets of the three cities.

About 1,500 army, 1,200 paramilitary BDR, 11,252 police, 1,740 armed-police battalion, 1,285 ansar and 16,104 embodied ansar personnel have been deployed since Monday and would continue on security duty till April 26.

The Election Commission (EC) has, meanwhile, expressed satisfaction over its preparations and security arrangements, and opti-

mism of holding the election in an unhindered atmosphere.

"Movements of the troops on the streets would bring confidence among the general public," said SM Zakaria, acting secretary to EC told The Daily Star yesterday.

Twenty-eight people are in the race for three mayoral posts while 1,321 are running for 201 ward commissioner positions, including 50 reserved for women.

Local and foreign observers belonging to different non-government organisations have collected their accreditation cards from the Election Commission to monitor tomorrow's polls.

Troops mobilised to maintain law and order in aid to the civil administration were seen last night patrolling the streets of the capital.

Army Chief Lt. Gen. Harun-ar-Rashid visited several camps in the capital city and directed members of the army to ensure safety for the electors so that they can turn up at the polling station and return home safely.

Candidates launched a hectic last-minute door-to-door campaign in the city yesterday as the official electioneering.

Each area, each ward and lane

and by-lane of the capital city were full of processions, rallies, gatherings and slogans seeking vote for the contenders.

Candidates accompanied by their relatives and supporters brought out processions and met voters and sought votes.

As yesterday was the last day for campaign, campaigning started from very early in the morning. They met voters at residences, shops, markets, and on the streets. They shook hands, gave their identity and leaflets and sought help electing in the polls.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna adds: Both rival groups of the BNP claimed blessings of the four-party alliance, creating confusion among the voters. Meantime, the Muslim League yesterday extended support to mayoral hopeful Shaikh Tayebur Rahman.

Our Rajshahi correspondent adds: Rajshahi city turned into a city of processions. Ward commissioner candidates brought out over 200 processions.

Polls violence rising

FROM PAGE 1

commissioner candidate of Ward No. 14. "They came to my house at about 11:45pm and threatened to kill me for running in the polls," said Khan.

Md. Sharfuddin, an independent candidate of ward No. 53, told The Daily Star that he and his supporters were on the run due to frequent threats and attacks by his rival four-party alliance candidate Ariful Islam. "He threatened me to keep away from the polls," he alleged, adding that, "My life is now at stake."

Of the two slain, BNP leader and independent ward commissioner candidate Wahiduzzaman of ward No. 42 was killed on March 27 as he reportedly refused to withdraw from the race. Hired goons of Salimullah Salu, another independent candidate from the same ward, allegedly gunned him down near his residence in Mohammadpur.

Abdul Khan Mollah, 13 and a leader of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, was shot dead by miscreants during an election campaign for the four-party alliance candidate Sharmial Imam near Moghbazar crossing on the night of April 10.

Of the injured, four-party nominee candidate of ward No. 20 Ruhul Amin Jahangir was shot allegedly by hired goons of listed criminal Alauddin at Begunbari under the Tejgaon Police Station in the evening of April 7. Two children also sustained injuries when the miscreants exploded crackers.

On April 11, Tanvir Adel Khan, an independent candidate of ward No. 32, was shot and wounded when he was leading a procession in the Bangabandhu National Stadium area. Miscreants allegedly belonging to ruling BNP beat up and broke both hands of Haji Shahid, independent candidate of ward No. 71, on April 18.

A leader of Gulshan unit of the BNP was critically injured when armed miscreants allegedly belonging to his rival when he was campaigning for another candidate the same day.

Five people were injured when a procession of independent candidate of ward No. 62 Mir Mosharraf Ali came under bomb attack on the night of April 20. Miscreants also ransacked two election offices of Ali.

Twelve persons were injured when miscreants fired shot and blasted crackers on a procession of independent candidate for ward No. 13 Shamsuddin Mollah on April 12. Miscreants attacked procession of another independent candidate of ward No. 71 Abu Syed on the same day, leaving eight persons injured.

miscreants belonging to four-party alliance nominee Ariful Islam allegedly attacked the supporters of independent candidate of ward No. 53 Sharfuddin as they were stick posters in Moghbazar area also on April 12.

Miscreants fired on two processions, one at Monipuripara in Mirpur and the other at Nayatola in Ramna, leaving 12 persons injured in the incidents.

The officer-in-charge and two constables of the Mirpur Police Station were injured when supporters of an independent candidate clashed with them at Darus Salarn Road on the night of April 22.

Crackers were hurled at a procession of Ali Ashraf, an independent candidate of ward No. 62 on April 20. Ashraf was also asked to keep away from the election. Crackers were also blasted on a procession of independent candidate of ward No. 14 Lutfar Rahman on April 18.

The police arrested three miscreants and seized firearms from them when they were preparing to attack a procession in the Mirbagh area on April 14. Three persons were injured when the police locked in clash with the gangsters and exchanged shots. Two other persons were arrested while hoodlums belonging to two rival candidates were fighting to establish supremacy at Nawabpur Road in the old part of the city on April 12.

Polling centres

FROM PAGE 12

sioner candidates, 29 are incumbent ward commissioners and 10 are 'listed terrorists', according to sources.

The 29 incumbents do not include notorious criminal Ershad Ali Shikdar of ward no. 21 and Sheikh Abdul Karim of ward no. 16 who were elected in 1994 KCC election.

Ershad Shikdar, now in Khulna district jail, has been given death sentence in as many as seven murder cases. His nomination paper was rejected by the Election Commission on ground of being a convicted prisoner.

Fifteen incumbent ward commissioners now in the race belong to BNP, seven to Awami League and seven are independent candidates. Five of the independent candidates are AL men.

Three out of six incumbent women ward commissioners are contesting for the reserved seats.

Police foil

FROM PAGE 12

Mia Mostaq Ahmed asked District AL President Najma Rahman on the phone not to hold the meeting, saying he had information about a potential chaos centring the meeting, the district AL president said.

Minutes later, President of the Narayanganj Club Azmal Hossain also told her on the phone that the DC, the police superintendent and the officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Police Station were pressing him to cancel the booking for the meeting.

Asked, the DC said he did not give orders for cancellation of the meeting. He had just made a request, though, he said.

In protest, the AL held a meeting in front of the party office in the town. The AL rally over, the district unit of the BNP brought out a procession, shouting slogans against the AL and its chief Sheikh Hasina.

Quick disposal

FROM PAGE 12

another case on the incident on their own.

Later, the case was handed over to the DB police from Sutrapur thana with Inspector Lutfar Rahman as the Investigation Officer.

Under the original charge sheet submitted, to the CMM's Court in March 2001, Rahid Hassan alias Suman and 29 others, including Suman's father Sultan Ahmed and his younger brother Sajal, were named as accused.

But the court ordered a fresh probe as the complainant and father of slain Mohsin submitted a *na-razi* (non-acceptance) petition requesting the reinvestigation.

Campaign

FROM PAGE 1

But exceptions were also found. A housewife in ward 46 in Mohammadpur said, "Our commissioner did a lot of development works in our area. It is only for of him that I'll be going to the (polling) center."

Some were found very conscious of their democratic right. A small percentage of the interviewees were found willing to cast vote to exercise this right.

"I'll cast my vote despite fear of violence. I don't want my valuable vote to be misused," said an owner of a medicine shop at Indira Road.

Friends and relatives of candidates cannot but cast their vote. A voter in ward no. 42 in Mohammadpur said, "My friend who is contesting for the post of ward commissioner came to my residence twice for vote. I must go and vote for him".

Good numbers of the interviewees were found dismayed that many candidates are 'listed criminals'. They expressed their disappointment that those who should have been behind the bars were campaigning to become public representatives.

"We have to choose between two criminals. Two well-known criminals are contesting for the post of commissioner in our ward", one voter said requesting this correspondent not to identify the ward. Some voters in the area refused to make any comment.

RPCL delights

FROM PAGE 1

with the PDB.

Under this contract, Lahmeyer International and Palli Power Service annually charge US\$9.68 million as charge for operation and maintenance and return of the plant's equity.

Again, in contrast, the Haripur plant charges US\$4.69 million for the same purpose.

The unusual PPA was signed bypassing the Cabinet Purchase Committee, a gross violation of government rules and regulations. The purchase committee approved all other PPAs signed by the PDB with any independent power units.

While the per-unit power cost of the RPCL is around Tk 0.70, it had been lobbying from early 2000 that the PDB should purchase power directly from its plant at Tk 2.15 per unit.

All the PPAs, excepting that of the RPCL, were signed by the PDB through thorough negotiations before the parties concerned started setting up power plants. The PDB held no prior negotiation with either the REB or the RPC.

The PDB had been resisting this inconsistent deal for over a year but

had to surrender to the pressure from the then state minister for energy and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which fattered the concept of the RPCL. The PDB argued that there was no reason why the RPCL's power should be so costly when it was gas fired.

The RPCL was originally designed to generate power and sell the same to the REB. The REB purchases PDB power at the country's lowest bulk price of Tk 1.84 per unit.

The RPCL project, outlining a budget of US\$34 million, was originally scheduled to be complete by late 1996.

However, bureaucratic tangles and lack of plant developer's drive delayed the project by four years, leading to cost escalation up to US\$50 million.

A similar amount was spent to set up the second phase of the plant. In contrast, a 70MW power plant set up by the PDB in the late 1990s in Shahjibazar cost only US\$28 million.

The PBSs under the REB now purchase around 300MW power from the PDB.