

'Access to electricity in country up by 17pc since 1971'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The access to electricity in the country has soared by around 17 per cent since independence, according to USAID.

Its officials told reporters during a field trip to several US AID-supported projects at Savar that in 1971 three per cent of the total population in Bangladesh had access to electricity; today, the number is around 20 per cent.

Considering electricity as a wheel of development, US AID had contributed about \$200 million for establishment of rural electrification programmes through formation of Dhaka Palli Bidyut Samity-1 (DPBS), a business success in co-operative concept.

Bangladesh has a large unsatisfied demand for energy, which is growing by 10 per cent annually. It has the lowest per capita consumption of commercial energy in South Asia. The country has an installed capacity of 3,300 megawatts (MW); however, only 2,600 megawatts are considered "available" at any given time, an USAID official said.

As a result, the country has been unable to meet the demand for electricity, and all parts of the country, including the capital, Dhaka, experience frequent load-shedding.

To respond to the growing energy demand, the country has allowed private independent power producers into the market since 1996, US AID officials said.

They said this measure aims to increase the supply of energy to over 6,500 MW by the year 2005. However, it will still mean a shortfall of more than 1,000 MW due to the retirement of older power stations.

US AID Bangladesh Mission Director Gene V. George told reporters that Bangladesh has very large natural gas resources. If utilised fully,

the gas resources could accelerate energy sector development and promote rapid economic growth.

For Bangladesh, energy sector growth is more than an indispensable condition for economic development, said MA Sabur, general manager of DPBS1.

He said the DPBS-1 was established with a 0.5 MW generation capacity with only 500 subscribers but now it has 1,39,00 subscribers and the number of subscribers have been increasing 15 per cent per year.

The rural electrification programme is considered one of the country's most successful development efforts. "The programme is based on the US cooperative model that successfully electrified rural America," George said.

Since the inception of the project, 67 Palli Bidyut Samity (PBS) have been established and 144,000 km of lines have been constructed. Over 36,000 villages have been electrified serving over 25 million people.

The project has only 9.68 per cent systems loss against the Power Development Board's 18 per cent and Dhaka Electric Supply's 32 per cent. It has earned a net profit of Tk 580 million in the fiscal 2001.

Talking to newsmen, the DPBS MD said the DPBS-1 has 99 per cent bill collection. It only has some defaulters with the government and autonomous bodies.

The rural electrification programme employs over 10,000 people and additional 30,000 jobs have been created by sales of electric hardware.

The USAID officials also took journalists to homestead gardening project run by Helen Keller International (HKI) at Ashulia.

The concept would work through providing food supplement and reduce vitamin A deficiency.

"The gardening not only provides

vegetables for poor families but also help them to earn cash by selling excess produce," said an HKI official.

Usha Feed Limited, a private sector poultry feed producing company, was launched in 1999 through technical assistance under the Agro-based Industries and Technology Development Project-II (ATDP II) of USAID.

The ATDP-II has provided technical assistance to the company to formulate new cattle feed product. The ATDP II also assisted the firm in updating the existing product formula, which resulted in quality improvement, reduction of production cost, and a significant increase in sales.

The officials also took journalists to a primary health care clinic located at Desgao, Savar, providing a full range of the essential health services including family planning, maternal and child health, immunisation, reproductive tract or sexually transmitted infection cases.

The project also provides counselling of HIV/AIDS, adolescent health and treatment of common ailments.

Ex-whip Shuja get ad-interim bail

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday granted ad-interim bail to former Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad and Khulna City Awami League leader Mustafa Rashidi Shuja.

The court also issued rule in this regard.

A division bench comprising Justice Abdur Rashid and Justice Siddiqur Rahman Miah passed the order.

Mustafa Rashidi Shuja was arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code by the security forces.

Barrister M Amirul Islam moved the petition on behalf of the petitioner.

A four-member high-powered committee has been formed to investigate the accident. The committee comprise BR's chief mechanical engineer, chief traffic manager, chief engineer and the additional chief cable and signal engineer, the press release said.

Sk. Selim

FROM PAGE 12 forwarding report to the court. In the report, the investigation officer (IO) of the case said he gathered some important information about Selim's involvement in the attack on Khaleda's motorcade and he should be detained in the jail until submission of the chargesheet.

Selim, a former health minister, told the court that he was not present at the place of occurrence on the day of the incident. That day, he was in Gopalganj, he added.

The defence lawyers submitted four petitions for his bail, treatment in jail, division in jail as an MP and permission to Selim's wife to supply food and medicine for him.

On the other hand, the prosecution opposed the bail petition.

Hearing both sides, Magistrate Eshak Hasan rejected the bail petition and issued a detention order. The court also directed the jail authorities to arrange necessary steps for treatment and to allow Selim's wife to supply food and medicine for her husband.

Selim was arrested on October 21 in his Banani residence and later shown arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Train mishaps

FROM PAGE 1 This latest collision, between the Chittagong and Sylhet bound Udayan Express, has claimed eight lives.

Human elements such as breach of rules have caused 25 per cent of the accidents while technical defects have been the cause 50 per cent of the accidents, according to the assessments of Bangladesh Railway. The remaining have occurred due to miscellaneous causes.

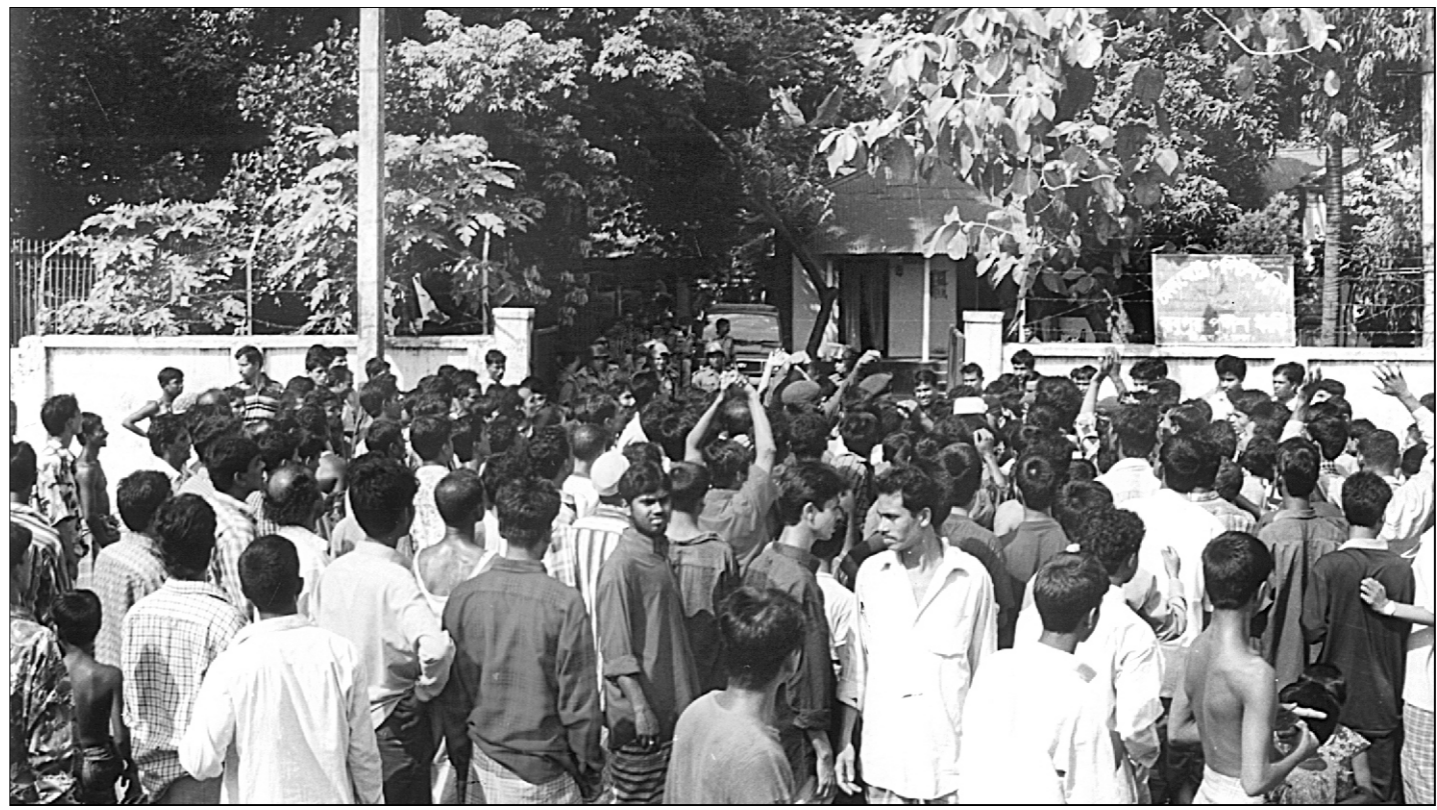
The latest accident occurred due to carelessness and negligence of either the driver concerned or the guard, railway sources said.

Sources quoting preliminary findings of railway authority said the driver of Sylhet-bound Udayan Express had totally disregarded the signal prior to the accident. Besides, the train was moving at a speed of 40-km per hour instead of 10-km per hour at the time, sources revealed.

According to the statistics, 249 accidents occurred in 1991-92, 233 in 1992-93, 378 in 1993-94, 292 in 1994-95, 239 in 1995-96, 413 in 1996-97, 257 in 1997-98, 358 in 1998-1999, 456 in 1999-2000, 552 accidents in 2000-2001.

However, the figure for a period of six months from July to December of the year 2001 was not available.

The figure for this year was 156 till September, sources said.



Angry hawkers lay siege to the Babupura Police Outpost after law enforcers clubbed them in an eviction drive against sidewalk traders at Fulbaria in the city yesterday.

Unocal expects early decision on gas export to India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

US oil giant Unocal organised a discussion meeting here yesterday where a top IOC executive urged for an expeditious government decision in favour of gas export to India.

Addressing the meeting, Jim Stone, president of Unocal South Asia Energy Limited, said the international oil companies (IOCs) working in Bangladesh are expecting an early decision from the government on the gas export issue as the IOCs cannot afford to wait indefinitely as the issue drags on.

The meeting was organised in the backdrop of a Chittagong-bound long march opposing export of the country's gas. Local people including business leaders, educationists and journalists attended the meeting held at a restaurant here yesterday afternoon.

Stone said a clean policy decision by the government is the need of the hour to stimulate further foreign investment, which is very important for the country to attain self-sufficiency.

Referring to different studies including the USGS (United States Geological Survey) report and Norwegian Hydrocarbon study, Stone said Bangladesh has enormous gas reserve, which should leave surplus gas for export after meeting domestic demand. He said there is a great demand for Bangladesh's gas in northern India and pipeline export of surplus gas, which would fetch an annual income of US\$1.4 billion for the country, is the best way to exploit this natural resource.

But he said the opportunity might not last long since Bangladesh might lose out to other competitors in the market who are bidding for a contract for gas export to India.

Referring to the Bibiyana and Jalalabad Gas fields developed by Unocal, he said Petrobranga was now buying only 10 per cent of the gas produced from these two fields, while the Moulvibazar gas field

Acid attack on housewife in Satkhira

BSS, Satkhira

A housewife was seriously injured when a gang of miscreants threw acid on her at Debnagar village under sadar upazila of the district Saturday evening.

Police and victim's family said, Sufia Begum, 48, wife of Motalib Gazi, received burn injuries in her hand, belly, leg and back when the miscreants allegedly led by Akber Ali Gazi of the same village threw acid on her through the window of a kitchen. She was admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital in a critical condition.

5 of a family get life term for murder

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The First Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court, Barisal, yesterday awarded life term imprisonment to five members of a family in Shajahan Shikder murder case.

The convicts are Balu Khan, Motalib Khan, Saiful, Mahtab and Fetema.

The court also fined them Tk 5000 each, in default, they will have to suffer one more year in jail.

According to the prosecution, Shajahan Shikder was killed in 1999 at Halia village in Bakerganj Upazila of the district over a land dispute.

PM congratulates Tipu on winning Press Freedom Award

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday congratulated Tipu Sultan, a journalist, for winning international Press Freedom Award 2002 for courageous professional work.

This is for the first time that a journalist in South Asia has been honoured by this prestigious award.

Tipu Sultan was mercilessly beaten in Feni by musclemen of Awami League leader Joyal Hazari on January 25, 2001 for his objective reporting on atrocities of the Hazari Bahini when he was the UNB correspondent in Feni.

"I praise your courage, firmness and commitment for divulging truth amid adverse situation and in the face of repression," the prime minister said in her letter to Tipu.

She hoped that this unique example of Tipu would remain as a source of inspiration to other journalists.

Khaleda Zia wished Tipu good health, professional efficiency and success.

She had visited Tipu at Pangu Hospital last year. His legs and hands fractured, Tipu underwent seven operations in a Bangkok hospital.

Tipu Sultan, who is currently working at daily Prothom Alo in Dhaka, yesterday expressed his happiness for the award and said he was inspired it.

Three to die

FROM PAGE 12 tribunal handed down the judgement. Of the four, Jewel was tried in absentia.

special Three persons were given the death sentence yesterday and another one sentenced to life in prison by a special court on women and children repression in a sensational rape and murder case.

ISPR

FROM PAGE 12 to the police first and later sought help from the army in the area.

As a result, a group of army personnel cordoned off the Sangshad Bhaban area at around 6:30pm in an effort to nab the snatchers.

A panic among the general people occurred when the army initiated the cordoning and a chaotic situation resulted. Some people were also injured during the ensuing chaos.

However, the situation was brought under control with the army personnel explaining their activities.

The army neither used baton nor beat up any person during the operation, the ISPR claimed.

Schoolteacher

FROM PAGE 1 court however granted three.

The police picked up the four from North Road in Bhutergoli where Swapon, a teacher of the Government Laboratory High School, was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen.

They were taken to the Dhanmondi Police Station for interrogation. Three were later released, as their implication with the case was not proved, Dhanmondi police said.

"We have shown Monirul arrested as his involvement with the murder was primarily proved," said duty officer of the Dhanmondi Police Station. He quoted the First Information Report (FIR) saying that the killer stayed at Monirul's laundry shop at 2nd North Road before the killing.

"We believe that he has close links with the killers," the duty officer said.

Kabirul Islam Molla, sub-inspector (SI) of Dhanmondi police, is the investigation officer of the case.

Meanwhile, family members of Swapon took his body to Feni yesterday for cremation.

Sheikh Helal's cousin

FROM PAGE 1 lived in, an army team went to Masum's house at around 1:00am and knocked on the door. As Masum opened the door, he was asked about his profession and his political background.

Another employee, Ekhlash, told The Daily Star that the army team tied and blindfolded Masum and asked him to hand over illegal firearms.

When he said he was not in possession of any weapon, the troops started beating him. They also searched the house.

At one stage, Masum said there was a licensed firearm in his brother Shawkat Biswas's residence, which was a couple of minutes' walk away.

The troops then took him to his brother's house. As Shawkat was not home, the army team asked his wife Anjuman Ara Biswas whether there was any firearm in the house.

When she said no, they said they would continue to beat her brother-in-law until the firearm was handed over to them.

Later, Masum was taken to the army camp at the Sheikh Nasir Stadium.

Next morning, Anjuman Ara handed over a licensed gun to the army, Rommel Biswas, Masum's younger brother, told The Daily Star. However, Masum was not released.

On Thursday morning, the 38-year-old Jubo League leader fell sick and was left at the KMCH premises unattended. Next morning, as his condition deteriorated, his family took him to the DMCH where he died yesterday.

Masum's body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Several photojournalists, who went to the hospital to take his photograph, said the lower part of Masum's body bore marks of severe torture and was damaged.

Masum was not even implicated in any case anywhere in the country, his mother told our Khulna correspondent.

His body would be taken to Khulna today.

In the evening yesterday, the AL, the Jubo league and the Bangladesh Chhatra League jointly brought out a procession in protest at Masum's death in army custody.

Meanwhile, on the 11th day of the countrywide drive yesterday, the army arrested 212 people including 70 listed criminals and recovered 32 firearms.

There was neither any arrest

8 JP (Ershad) MPs meet PM, extend support to army drive

BSS, Dhaka

Eight opposition lawmakers belonging to Jatiya Party (Ershad) called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday and appreciated government's achievements in different fields in the last one year.

They also extended support to the ongoing countrywide joint drive by the army, police and BDR to nab the criminals and recover illegal arms.

The prime minister thanked the MPs for their contribution in development activities in the last one year and sought their cooperation in future.

The JP MPs were Noor Mohammad Mandol, M Mosthiur Rahman, Mohammad Ali Sarkar, Shah M Solaiman Alam, M Motiur Rahman, Hafizuddin Ahmed, M Majibur Rahman and Karim Uddin Bharasha.

The MPs praised Khaleda's efforts to resist crime and maintain law and order as per her election pledge.

nor recovery of firearms in Chittagong due to what army sources called a change in tactics.

In Mymensingh three people - Abul Kalam Azad, Jogindra Chandra Hrisi and Barun Hrisi - were arrested in the early hours of yesterday.

In Madaripur two leaders of the Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal (JCD) - Shentu Khan and Mizan Sikder - were arrested.

Seventy-two criminals were hauled up during a joint drive in the southwestern districts of Barisal, Bhola, Jhalakathi, Patuakhali, Barguna and Shariatpur.

Of them 14 each were arrested from Barisal and Bhola, three from Jhalakathi, nine from Patuakhali, 11 from Barguna, nine from Shariatpur and 12 from Madaripur.

In Sylhet 13 people including an identified criminal were arrested.

In Gaibandha 16 people were hauled up in the last two days. Also arrested was a Jubo Dal leader from Bogra.

So far, the army has arrested 2,928 people, including 1,027 listed criminals, and seized 302 firearms along with 7,456 rounds of ammunition since the drive began on October 17.

Latifur Rahman

FROM PAGE 1 In the petition, they said that they were not mentally prepared as their senior colleague Sirajul Haq was in coma at a hospital.

A bail petition on behalf of Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, main accused in the case, was also submitted to the court yesterday. The court fixed October 30 for hearing the petition.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on the night of April 23, 1998.

All the six accused Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shanirun, Minu and Parvin - now in jail custody, were produced in the court during the hearing.

Special public prosecutors Arfan Uddin Khan, ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul, Saima Khanam and Assistant PP Anisur Rahman appeared for the state while advocates Mosharrar Hossain Kajol, Mohammad Hanif, Mizanur Rahman, Anwarul Kabir Babul and MA Kamrul Hsan Khan Aslam appeared for the accused.

Ordinance: AL

FROM PAGE 12 others would be tried in normal courts for similar offences.

AL leaders also criticised the arrest of people for possessing licensed arms and seizure of those arms. Samad Azad said the government did not ask people to surrender their licensed guns but are harassing them for possessing those.

Former home minister Mohammad Nasim said the government in a December 29 (2001) issued cancelled arms licences issued during January-July in 2001, terming those illegal. But the High Court later gave a verdict against that order. So, there is no reason why army should seize licensed guns, he said.

Persons having licensed arms are now passing days in fear while criminals possessing illegal arms are getting away with those.

Replying to a question on the reported government plan to form a 'national security council' with the authority to take decision on deployment of army in future, Samad Azad said, "Formation of a national security council can never be accepted."

He demanded immediate release of AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and AL chief Sheikh Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

He also criticised the government for 'using' the army for arresting 'innocent political personalities' and raiding and sealing off AL's Centre for

Research and Information (CRI).

"We would like to see that the current army drive remains above political influence and becomes successful in curbing crimes and seizing illegal arms", the acting president of AL said.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 12 Director Frederick T Temple, ADB Country Director Toru Shibuichi, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed and Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan spoke at the workshop.

The WB country director said the sustainability of the fiscal deficit is an important issue because Bangladesh's fiscal performance has deteriorated considerably in recent years due to a sharp increase in expenditures, especially ADP's.

"These increases were not matched by commensurate growth in revenues. As a result, the central government deficit reached the equivalent of over six per cent of GDP in FY2000, compared with an average of 4.6 per cent during the 1990s," he said.

Temple, however, appreciated that the government reduced the central government deficit to 4.6 per cent in FY2002 and the FY2003 budget targets it at 4.1 per cent.