

Saifur for quick decision on gas export

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman has said there should be a quick decision on export of gas as the country needs a huge investment for development of its energy sector.

Terminating the debate on gas export a "never ending one," he however said the government does not want to take a decision alone. "Time is running out. We should not take decision emotionally. Rather, it should be on the basis of hard reality."

The minister was speaking as chief guest at the ICAB National Award-2001 giving ceremony, organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) in the city yesterday.

Saifur said the country's energy sector is "absolutely insolvent" and it is time to think of doing something to bring more investment in the sector because it is incurring huge losses

every year. In this context, he said a large number of countries found more gas than their earlier estimated reserves through more exploration. "But the question is do we have the money for this?"

The minister mentioned that some people say the country should export gas only after keeping it for the next 20, 30 or 50 years. "A large number of countries in the world do not have gas. Are they dying because they do not have it?," he questioned.

About alternative sources of energy, Saifur said the country has a large quantity of quality coal.

Referring to the Awami League's stand on gas export, Saifur said that while in power, they (AL) had signed so many PSCs in this regard but now they are opposing export of gas. "After committing misdeeds, now you (AL) are saying that you are against export of gas," he said.

Speedy Trial Tribunal

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The failure to the Supreme Court and sending a copy to the government.

The ordinance also says a maximum of an additional 15 more days may be allowed to clear off the case. In that event, the court would have to follow similar procedure.

In case of failure of disposal of case within the timeframe, the tribunal must have submit a report to the Supreme Court with explanation of about its failure in written with sending a copy to the government.

Similarly, the public prosecutor and police officials concerned would also be required to submit a report to the government and a copy to the Supreme Court explaining the failure.

Steps would be taken after reviewing the reports as per the service rule. Any failure on anyone's part would be considered as incompetence and would be put in the annual report of their service book.

As per the provision of the ordinance, the government has the authority to constitute the necessary number of Speedy Trial Tribunals for the country. If more than one tribunal is constituted the government would determine the jurisdiction of the tribunal through gazette notification.

The president can appoint judges to the tribunals, one for each tribunal from among serving sessions judges. The status of the tribunal would be

equal to that of the sessions judge's court. The court will deal with the case, which the government will transfer to the tribunal through gazette notification. The government will also appoint special public prosecutor for the tribunal.

The ordinance has a provision of appeal against the verdict of the tribunal to the High Court within 30 days of the verdict. After starting of a case, the tribunal would continue the trial without any break until the final verdict. However, if it feels that a recess in the proceeding is needed for the interest of justice, the court may adjourn case for maximum three working days.

Video and still photographs and tape records will be accepted as evidence, but the tribunal cannot hand out punishment to the accused only on the basis of these evidences.

On October 24, the president promulgated the ordinance while the cabinet approved it on November 11. Subsequently, the government formed six tribunals in the six divisional headquarters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal.

The law minister also placed the Court Fees (Amendment) Ordinance 2002, which suggests reducing court fees from Tk 500 to Tk 200.

Muhuri murder

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It may be recalled that following the murder of Muhuri, a case was filed with Kotwali Police Station and Officer-in Charge (OC) of it Ruhul Amin Siddique was made investigation officer (IO) of the case.

Later, the case was handed over to the DB with its Inspector Mainuddin made the IO. After a few days, Inspector Fariduddin Ahmad was made the IO and finally Sirajul Islam took over as the fourth IO of the case.

Sources in the DB quoting the chargesheet said that principal Muhuri was killed as per a plan of the gang who wanted to remove him from his post and see a man of their choice as principal. Besides, financial matters and domination on matters of the college were the other reasons behind the killing.

Some sources said Shibir Nasir was the main planner of the murder. While in police custody, he managed to hold a meeting with his fellow cadres and members of 'killer group' at a hotel in the city's Chawkbazaar area after the October 1 general elections last year.

Nasir had asked his brother Mohiuddin to implement their plan to kill Muhuri. As he refused to take the main responsibility, Habib Khan was given the task, the sources said.

But some other sources said the plan to kill the principal was made at a secret meeting on the Chittagong University campus. It was attended by, among others, Nasir, Habib Khan, Gittu Nasir, Baitiyya Alamgir, Azam, Mohiuddin, Chhota Saiful and accountant of Nazirhat College Shahjahan.

Gittu Nasir, Montu and Baitiyya Alamgir entered the residence of Muhuri while Chhota Saiful and Azam were waiting in a taxi on Jamal Khan Road. Gittu Nasir with his AK-56 rifle fired twice in Muhuri's head, leaving him dead on the spot, the sources said.

The arrest of Montu on July 3 this year along with an AK-56 rifle and later his confessional statement greatly helped police in the investigation.

Japanese Film Fair begins in Chittagong

CU CORRESPONDENT

A three-day Japanese Film and Education Fair began at the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers, Chittagong yesterday afternoon.

Japanese Embassy in the port city organised the fair in association with the Nippon Academy to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh.

ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, mayor of Chittagong, was the chief guest at the fair inaugurated by Jiro Kobayashi, ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh.

Mohammad Nurul Islam, consul general of Japanese Embassy in Chittagong was also present at the inaugural function along with hundreds of educationists, academics and students.

Jiro Kobayashi, in his inaugural address, expressed the hope that the fair would open a new window of information about Japan, its culture and educational opportunities and help promote mutual understanding, cooperation and friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

Graft case Charge-framing hearing against Hasina on Jan 2

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The hearing on charge-framing in a graft case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and two others will be held on January 2 next year in the Special Court for Dhaka Division.

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haq passed the order yesterday.

The two other accused are former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina's principal secretary S A Samad.

In the case filed with Tejaon police station, it is alleged that the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina in connivance with Abul Hasan Chowdhury and S A Samad and BEPZA executive chairman MAB Siddiq Talukder unnecessarily employed a lobbyist in the United States for garment Industries, causing a loss of Tk 2.1 crore to the country.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) filed the case against Hasina and the three others on December 11 last year.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case submitted charge sheet against Hasina and two others on June 18 this year.

Siddiq Talukder's name was not included in the charge sheet.

Later on July 20, Hasina obtained bail from the Metropolitan sessions, Judge's Court. The other two also got bail.

8 'sportsmen'

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Graft officer told The Daily Star. "Their tickets and visas were all right, but they failed to show us any proper document to back up their claim."

The judo association could not be contacted last night for comments about the team.

The youths have links with a criminal gang and were trying to slip out of the country to avoid the anti-crime drive, said another source.

They were scheduled to fly on a Thai Airways flight. Tipped off, the immigration authorities stopped them and wanted to check their documents. The youths could not show any government order.

Immigration officials said the eight could not satisfy them during interrogation. Later, they were handed over to the airport police.

Earlier, the immigration authorities with the help of airport police arrested Kala Faruq, a listed criminal, in an aircraft minutes before its take-off on November 4. Later, he was shot and killed by police allegedly when he tried to escape the police grip.

Former Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) ward commissioner and President of the Dock Workers' League Jahangir Alias Dock Jahangir was arrested on Sunday at the Chittagong airport minutes before he was to fly to Singapore.

Army

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said a press release of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) yesterday.

The members of the joint operation will not take any steps over the allegations about personal rivalry, family or land-related feuds and motivated allegations to harass rivals.

Deadline ends

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his licensed shotgun and a pistol with the Lalbagh Police Station.

In the city, most police stations saw heavy rush of arms depositors. People stood in long queue for hours to surrender their arms.

On November 5, the government asked all to deposit licensed firearms by November 15.

According to official sources, there are 189,142 licensed firearms -- 133,252 shotguns, 15,081 pistols and 18,405 revolvers in the country. A large number of legal arms are used for various criminal activities, police said.

The government earlier took several attempts to get teh licensed firearms deposited with poor response. The caretaker government also took a similar move, which also did not see much response.

Sources said about 70,000 licensed firearms have already been deposited with different police stations. The rest might not be deposited as they are in the hands of criminals.

Sources said the government would go for tough actions against anyone failing to deposit licensed firearms by the deadline. Their licences would also be cancelled.

The government will also cancel those licences taken under political influence and without following proper procedures. Those licences which have not been renewed will also be revoked.

In the city yesterday, the Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur Police Stations received 150 arms each, Kafrul received 123, Mirpur 100, Ramna 80, Uttara 86, Motijheel 78, Tejaon 50, Sutrapur 48, Khilgaon 43 and Lalbagh 40.

In Rajshahi, a total of 994 licensed firearms and 8,840 rounds of ammunitions were deposited with 123 police stations of the district till yesterday.

Dhaka to probe charges

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He noted that Advani has changed his position on what he had said about ISI and Al-Qaida activities in Bangladesh. "He said on November 7 that there had been an increase in the ISI and AL-Qaida activities in Bangladesh after the change of government in the country. But on November 10, he said there were 'reports about growing activities' of Al-Qaida and ISI in Bangladesh after the change of government."

Chowdhury said the Indian High Commission's press release was completely different not only in contents but also in emphasis from what the Indian home minister (Advani) said a couple of days earlier.

"While the Indian home minister spoke quoting unconfirmed reports about imaginary Al-Qaida presence or activities in Bangladesh, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka came up with a diametrically opposite allegation that elements in Bangladesh were supporting Indian insurgent groups."

Referring to the Indian High Commission's press release issued after Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka ML Tripathy was summoned to the foreign ministry on November

10, the foreign secretary wondered if Tripathy confused insurgents of the northeastern Indian states with Al-Qaida or ISI.

Tripathy was summoned to the foreign ministry to lodge Dhaka's protest against Advani's comments.

Chowdhury also said he did not understand why India was propagating against Bangladesh. "We did not react to Indian media campaign made so far. But we had to protest sharply after a senior leader like the deputy prime minister did the same."

He said he was no less surprised to see the Indian High Commission's allegation that eight to twelve million people from Bangladesh crossed over to India. But, he said, they did not specify the period when it took place. "Did it start in 1947?" he questioned, adding that Dhaka would seek a clarification from New Delhi on the matter.

Asked about Dhaka's observation that 'criminals' from Bangladesh are crossing over to India since the start of the anti-crime crackdown, Chowdhury said particulars of the criminals would be given to the Indian authorities for

their action. But, he would not specify the number of or name those criminals.

About India's allegation that ULFA leader Anup Chetia and Sanjib Dev Burman of ATTF were well taken care of in Bangladesh jail, he said whatever was done to them were done as per law of the land. "We'll communicate the legal position and status of the two to the Indian government."

Asked whether the latest issue may strain the relation between the two neighbouring countries, the foreign secretary pointed out that differences between two close neighbours are nothing unusual. "It's the desire and commitment of Bangladesh to maintain and improve the bilateral relations with India in the interests of good relations and interests of the two peoples."

The joint-secretary level Indo-Bangla trade talks would be held as per earlier schedule of December 2-3, he told the briefing.

The foreign secretary also said the reported move by India to erect barbed wire fence along the international boundary is bound to have an adverse impact on its neighbours.

Reliance on Sangu

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steadily."

The danger of an energy supply breakdown in Chittagong aside, increased gas purchase from Sangu means heavier financial burden for Petrobangla.

Petrobangla counts 2.75 dollars for every unit it buys from Sangu whereas its own per-unit gas production is roughly 20 cents.

Already, it owes Shell Oil more than \$100 million for purchase of Sangu gas at the rate of 120mmcf to 140mmcf. Now that the gas quantum has increased, the outstanding bill is likely to accumulate at a faster pace.

The Sangu field produces nearly 20 per cent of the country's peak gas supply of 1,190mmcf against a demand of 1,315mmcf.

However, the problem is rooted elsewhere.

"We would not have needed the extra Sangu gas had the Bakhrabad field not lost its original gas flow pressure, or had we installed a compressor in the field to revive its pressure up to a certain level," said a well-placed source in the Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL).

GTCL and Petrobangla sources said the Awami League government had ignored repeated suggestions by experts to install back in 1996-97 a compressor in the Bakhrabad gas field to keep its gas flow pressure up

to a desired level. This would have required a few million dollars.

Again, the BNP government's decision in the early 1990s to force Petrobangla into extracting additional gas from the Bakhrabad field to cater to the need of the KAFCO led to damage of its gas structure. This led to a loss of gas worth hundred millions of dollars, the sources said.

Now because of the low pressure at the Bakhrabad gas field, Sangu's gas pressure had to be reduced as both have been brought under the same system, eliminating the storage backup in Chittagong. In such a context, Petrobangla experts fear that accidents can take place. And the situation would be grim.

With the beginning of the test operation of the Meghnaghat 450MW power plant, Petrobangla had to augment gas supply by asking the Sangu operators to increase gas production by 40mmcf. Meghnaghat requires 75mmcf of gas.

At the same time, Petrobangla had to reorganise its gas flow system for technical reasons and dedicate Bakhrabad and Sangu fields exclusively to supply gas to Chittagong.

Bakhrabad supplies a maximum of 35mmcf nowadays and used to be one of the many sources for Dhaka's gas until two months ago.

In normal pressure (higher than

that of Bakhrabad's), the Chittagong pipelines would contain 60mmcf to 70mmcf in place at any given time, even if gas supply were cut off from the source.

This volume of gas can continue supply to consumers in Chittagong for six to seven hours. At the present pressure, this volume of gas will not be available inside the pipe, if a source like Sangu stops supply. In other words, if Sangu stops supply, gas-based units would have to stop functioning.

"But we have arranged a by-pass pipeline for emergency gas supply," said a Petrobangla top official. "If any situation arises, some basic system will function."

As an alternative, Petrobangla could have taken Unocal's Jalalabad gas from the Sylhet region. However, the gas pipelines coming from Sylhet region is already saturated and that option had to be ruled out for the time being.

"It is possible to improve the Bakhrabad gas system's pressure by installing a compressor in its pipeline," the GTCL official explained a way out.

"If the Bakhrabad gas pressure is increased, Sangu gas pressure can also be increased and that would bring into alignment other pipeline systems. This would also help the Chittagong pipelines to have 60-70mmcf of gas as storage for emergency use."

Hasina rattles JS boycott threat

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Briefing newsmen at the conference room of the opposition deputy leader's chamber, Hasina noted that the rights of the lawmakers have been curbed by not allowing them to discuss important issues in the House.

She noted that at the Wednesday's Business Advisory Committee meeting Prime Minister Khaleda Zia rejected all the seven issues on which the AL wanted to hold general discussions in parliament. But while, she noted, the general discussion was not allowed, the ministers concerned gave statements on those issues in the House yesterday.

"If this is the case, then what's the use of our participation in the parliament?" the AL chief said.

At the Business Advisory Committee meeting Wednesday, the AL proposed holding of general discussions on the ongoing anticrime army drive, law and order, price hike of essentials, tariff increase on gas and electricity, seed crisis, corruption in administration and alleged irregularities in the open

market sales (OMS) of rice. But as the BNP members refused to accept any of their proposals, three AL lawmakers -- Abdul Hamid, Abdus Shahid and Rahmat Ali -- walked out of the meeting.

In yesterday's session, two ministers -- Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Agriculture Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami -- gave separate statements on army deployment and seed crisis. But the opposition lawmakers were not given any chance to discuss on those issues.

Hasina deplored that she was kept standing for 15 minutes to get the floor and when she finally got the microphone, it was switched off after a few minutes.

"The microphone of the opposition leader is supposed to be automatically switched on whenever they want to speak," said Hasina.

She also alleged that the government has jeopardised her life by forcing her to surrender licensed arms.

The opposition leader said the prime minister has to take responsibility

for the 25 custodial deaths during the ongoing army drive.

She alleged that many criminals nabbed by army have been released due to the government's interference. But AL leaders and workers were being arrested without any specific charges against them, she said.

The opposition leader expressed her shock at the arrest of three opposition lawmakers and her political secretary, who, she said, were implicated in false cases.

Turning to the open market sale of rice, Hasina alleged that the government appointed party men as OMS dealers who have committed gross irregularities in rice allotment.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the parliament Abdul Hamid, senior party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, SAMS Kibria, ASHK Sadique, Chief Whip of the Opposition Abdus Shahid, Whip Faruq Khan and AKM Jahangir were also present at the briefing.

Stormy walkout marks start

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row to stand up and ask for floor on points of order.

With Nizami finished, opposition leader Sheikh Hasina sought floor. But the Chair gave floor to Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury to issue a statement on the army deployment and all the AL deputies sprang to their feet in protest.

However, for the next several minutes the home minister continued reading out his written statement amidst chaos while Hasina stood there all the time.

When Hasina got the floor, she said, "You (speaker) gave the minister the floor even though I stood up and drew your attention. If you want to run the House unilaterally then what is the use of our being in the parliament?"

"We wanted to discuss important issues but at the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting (on Wednesday) all our proposals were rejected. Today our front-ranking lawmakers stood to speak but you refused."

Hasina then said to the chair that her party colleagues be allowed to speak first before she spoke. But the speaker did not oblige, saying, "I wouldn't enter

tain points of order now."

Then the opposition leader spoke about such issues as arrest of three lawmakers and alleged tortures on them, price hikes of essentials and government corruption. But the chair suddenly switched her microphone off. This further enraged the AL legislators and they walked out of the House. But they came back five minutes later.

In no time, however, a debate raged the House once again over the time span of call attention notice. The AL lawmakers protested the speaker's briefly concluding the session on call attention notice. They said as per rules at least 15 lawmakers should be allowed to speak for two minutes each on the notices they submitted.

But the speaker explained that he was not willing to continue with the call attention notices for half an hour as the lawmakers sitting on the Treasury Bench were not interested to speak on their notices.

Without allowing further arguments on the issue, the chair rather gave the Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister

Moudud Ahmed the floor to place before the House the Speedy Trial Tribunal Ordinance, 2002.

At this stage, senior AL leader Suranjit Sengupta and Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Chahid protested the chair's cutting short the call attention notice session.

Suranjit argued that if the lawmakers were interested to speak on notices they should be allowed to speak and also go on record; otherwise, others would not know they were interested to speak.

He then briefly touched upon the issues of arrests of three MPs, and 25 custodial deaths. He demanded that the leader of the house give a statement explaining why the civil administration failed to deliver. Leader of the House Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who was present, however, remained unmoved.

As the opposition chief whip demanded of the chair to continue the call attention notice session for half an hour, the speaker abruptly adjourned the day's sitting at 1:10pm, keeping rest of the lawmaking agenda in abeyance. The House will sit again at 1:15pm on Sunday.

DAB project

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55 crore to build the physical and instrumental infrastructure of the centre inside the BIRDEM compound. The Ministry of Social Welfare provided the money to the DAB authorities.

"The project has not been free of problem. The delays in initiating the centre were mainly in construction and equipment installation," Anita said. She however claimed that they had opened the centre on a limited scale, dealing mainly with outpatients, since June 15 this year.

"We cannot start without fully ensuring that all facilities required for a cardiac centre of international standard are in place. But the DAB authorities put pressure on us to open the centre earlier," said Bell.

Professor AK Azad Khan, secretary general of the DAB, when contacted yesterday said the allegations were baseless.

"All the facilities and support were there and documents show that their own electrical engineer from Sweden had verified that there was sufficient power to run machines. It is an absolutely baseless accusation," Prof Azad said.

"As per the contract the SBMC was supposed to go into full operation by September. But on its request we had extended the time until October 30. Yet they were not prepared to provide services."

He said, "The SBMC produced false documents to prove their financial strength but it was found

that they had no cash to fund their own activities in the hospital. In fact, they had not even recruited adequate manpower because of the shortage. At one stage, we found they were taking loans from a business house in Chittagong to finance their activities."

"Considering all these allegations brought up against the company not operating as per the contract, we were forced to call a meeting of the national council of DAB which handed down the order to suspend the SBMC's operation," Prof Azad concluded.

China

FROM PAGE 1
delegates to the 16th Congress, who counted some of society's most privileged, including a smattering of extremely rich tycoons.

In his characteristic baritone voice - the most commanding aspect of the chubby 76-year-old - Jiang followed a week of praise for his record and theories by applauding his own controversial plans.

"The amended Party Constitution adopted at the Congress establishes the important thought of the Three Represents," he said, referring to his own awkwardly-named package of ideas that will allow entrepreneurs to enter the party.

While the sound of Jiang is known to most Chinese TV viewers, very few in the world's most populous country have more than just an inkling of what his successor Hu Jintao is like.

Troops save police

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Shaikh Tariqul Islam -- were among the eleven picked up by the army in a pre-dawn raid on October 17.

Although Islam was a suspect in the Awami League leader SMA Rob murder case, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) did not include him in the chargesheet.

The joint forces arrested three listed criminals -- Monirul Islam Bappi, 34, Mirza Abu Saeed Naser, 30, and Tayerub Rahman Swapan, 28, in Gollamari area and another listed criminal, Tipu Molla, 32, and seized a pipe-gun in Terokhada in Khulna.

Our Pabna correspondent adds: Five people, including the joint-secretary of the district unit of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), were arrested in a raid.

The arrestees are Ahad Babu, a trainee advocate, Hasanur Rahman Rony, BCL joint secretary, Shiplu, an accused in the Jubo Dal leader Reazul Murder case, Mehedi, an alleged extortionist and Abdul Malek.

Arrested was Alauddin Malith, Hema yetpur Upazila chairman, in a city hotel.

A correspondent in Rajshahi said the joint forces arrested 16 people and recovered four firearms and 66 bullets from 16 districts in the district.

Our Netrokona correspondent reports that the army arrested six alleged criminals at Shyamganj Bazaar under Purbashola Upazila.

Govt has no plan to give allowance to all FFs,