

Reforms fail to see success

Power theft rampant as losses, arrears pile up

SHARIER KHAN

Reforms in the power sector are failing to achieve their goals, as losses and arrears of the DESA, DESCO, REB and PDB continue to break all previous records.

The total arrears in the power sector involving these organisations have exceeded Tk 6200. But organised thieves with political backing are going unpunished, said sources.

If the government could ensure financial discipline in the sector, it

could make a profit of more than Tk 500 crore from selling power annually. Instead, the sector is swallowing at least Tk 400 crore as annual loss.

Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) owes the Power Development Board (PDB) a total outstanding bill of Tk 5200 crore and different consumers owe PDB over Tk 1000 crore in arrears.

Even the much-praised Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) has failed to perform up to the expectation.

A wholly owned company of DESA, DESCO has Tk 127 crore of arrears with DESA for purchase of power. These arrears are equivalent to more than a year's billing of this company that deals with power distribution in Mirpur.

But such track records did not wake up the policymakers to rethink about the donor-driven reform measures it has been pursuing for over a decade. The cabinet recently decided to give DESCO three profit-making DESA zones of Gulshan, Baridhara and Uttara.

"This move is futile," comments a DESA official, "it has been proved that DESCO has not succeeded to perform up to the expectation."

The system loss level of both DESA and DESCO has decreased from 43 per cent in 1997 to about 25 per cent recently. PDB's system loss has also come down from about 40 per cent to 22 per cent.

Sources said these improvements were more or less results of

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Poor procurement, depleting stock

Govt to buy foodgrain from domestic market

REAZ AHMAD

A sluggish internal procurement and depleting stocks in silos have forced the government to go for commercial foodgrain purchase this year from domestic market.

Food ministry sources said tender will be floated soon to buy at least 70,000 MT of rice and wheat as a dismal aman procurement failed on December 1 in previous seasons.

Officials said the poor aman procurement was due to delayed start, higher market prices than the government-fixed rate and short-fall in production.

The government's foodgrain reserve is less than five lakh MT now and it may decrease further when distribution of wheat and rice from its silos for works under food-aided programmes will begin next month.

The reserve decreased as the government disbursed four lakh MT of foodgrains from silos under its open market sale (OMS) programme against a stipulated allocation of one lakh MT when rice prices shoot up in the market

late last year.

To offset the high price, the government also drastically cut import duties on rice.

On February 17, it slashed duty on rice import from 29 per cent to 7.5 per cent. As a result private rice importers are exempted from paying 15.5 percent customs duty, 3 percent advance income tax (AIT) and 3 percent development surcharge (DSC).

Government also allowed rice import through Sona Masjid customs point in Rajshahi in addition to those in Darshana, Biroi, Burimari, Hili, Tamabil and Teknaf.

Hasina calls for united movement to remove govt

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for a united movement to remove the BNP-Jamaat "autocratic" regime immediately.

"They have failed to rule... Everything is ruined after one and a half years... A nation of victors has been turned into a nation of terrorists... They must quit," she said at a meeting with the elected office-bearers of Bogra Bar Association at Awami League Dhammandi office.

The former prime minister said her government had turned Bangladesh into a promising nation but now people live in constant terror.

"Price spirals, lawlessness, corruption, flagrant violation of human rights, absence of the rule of law and finally Bangladesh being included in the US list of terror-risk nations marked the rule of the alliance regime," she told her audience from the district bar.

She alleged that the government deployed army "with orders to kill people" after failing to control the anarchic situation.

"It was at the prime minister's order that the army was called out and people were killed, and the indemnity law was passed to protect her," she said.

Hasina said the people would not accept a law that "justifies killing in custody".

About the just-concluded NAM conference in Malaysia, she said the government dubbed the Non-Aligned Movement a "dead horse" and declined to host the summit in Dhaka. "But it is a shame that the prime minister spent crores of taka to attend the NAM summit," Hasina noted.

Alleging corruption and

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Fish trader murdered in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Selim Gazi, 24, a fish trader and Jubo Dal activist, was murdered at Banaragazi bazaar under Sonadanga upazila on Thursday night.

A listed criminal and accused in two murder cases, the slain fish trader was also complainant of Babul Gazi murder case.

Babul Gazi, younger brother of Selim Gazi, was murdered on August 8, 1998. This case is under trial in the Judge's Court, Khulna.

According to witnesses, a group of six young men called Selim Gazi out of his shop at around 9 pm and stabbed him in the chest and abdomen. He was rushed to the Khulna Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Son of Barek Gazi of Kashamabad area under Sonadanga thana, Selim Gazi was given death threat for not withdrawing the case.

Police said the killers are accused in Babul Gazi murder case.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Sonadanga police station said Selim Gazi was on bail in six criminal cases.

No case was filed with the police station concerned till 5 pm yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the followers of Charmonai Pir were returning to Jessor after attending a mahfil (religious meet) at Charmonai.

The injured were admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital while the rest to local health complex.

Our Barisal Correspondent reports: One person was killed and 40 others were injured as two buses carrying followers of Charmonai Pir collided head-on near Ashoktoli filling station here on Thursday night.

He prayed for salvation of the departed souls.

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ASM NURUNNABI

Food habits of Dhaka City's residents have undergone a considerable change over the last decade or so due to socioeconomic imperatives dictated by the fast pace of city life. More and more people nowadays are turning to restaurant food, as they can no longer afford to spare the time for cooking.

As urbanisation goes on relentlessly, fast food restaurants are fast becoming the city's main gastronomic hubs catering to the needs of people from all walks of life. People, especially who work two jobs, find these fast food restaurants very useful.

These restaurants are concentrated mainly in commercial areas where most offices are located. There is a heavy rush of customers in these restaurants during lunch hours.

Many of these restaurants cater a large variety of foods that were once alien to our gastronomical culture beef, chicken and fish burgers or sandwiches, pizzas, hot dogs, pasta, salami, pies, salads, French fries, milk shake, ice

creams of several flavours, all kinds of soft drinks, etc. And although people of different age groups frequent these eateries, the main customers of fast food are from the younger generation.

Food in some of these restaurants is however quite expensive and can only be afforded by those from high-income brackets.

The restaurant business employs a large number of people. Apart from waiters, cooks, dishwashers and janitors, there are people who take out deliveries to offices and homes.

Apart from the fast food restaurants, there is also a rise in the number of informal restaurants in the city. Once, it was the Chinese restaurants that dominated this area. But nowadays, other exotic foods like Mexican food and foods from Western countries are also becoming popular.

Another fairly recent development is the operation of mobile restaurants in selected localities of the city where educational and well-known business establishments are located. These mobile restaurants sell a variety of food

DOWN TO EARTH

Connoisseurs of Urban food in the city

items like Phootchka, Haleem, Chatpati, Jhalmuri, Chanachur, etc. Some sell seasonal fruits cut up nicely into small pieces.

Vendors of such foods do a brisk business particularly in places such as railway stations, bus stations, launch terminals and shopping centres where people gather in large numbers.

And finally there are numerous restaurants in the city where more

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Six dacoits, 5 snatchers held in Ctg

BSS, Ctg

Detectives arrested six members of an inter-district dacoit gang from in front of Bangladesh Bank here yesterday, police said.

The arrestees are Mohammad Abul Hossain, 41, son of Abdur Rahim of Panchkhan, Abul Kalam Hossain alias Abu, 30, son of Haji Hafizur Rahman of Uttar Gujra, Anwar Hossain alias Khokan, 40, son of late Elahi Bux of Purba Gujra, Imran Gani alias Suman, 21, son of Ishaq of Chowdhury Hat under Rangunia upazila, Abu Tyeb, 29, son of Hamidul Hoque Sikder and Al Mansur, 19, son of Kamchan Mian of village Hajipara under Rangunia upazila.

Acting on a secret information, detectives of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) reached in front of bank and nabbed the dacoits.

In another raid, Kotwali police arrested five snatchers from Asadganj area in the city at 2pm yesterday. A police patrol team caught the snatchers when they were trying to snatch valuables from one Farid Ahmed at gunpoint.

The arrested snatchers are Nazrul, Zasim, Saiful and Mohammad Hanif of Asbia under Patya upazila of the district and Mukhlesur Rahman of Rangpur district.



PHOTO: STAR

Road accident kills 9, injures 60 in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Nine people were killed and 60 others injured in a road accident in front of Mirzapur Health Complex on the Dhaka-Tangail Highway yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said the accident took place when a Dhaka-bound bus from Kurigram fell into a roadside ditch at around 6 am, killing eight passengers, including the driver of the bus, on Thursday night.

Another passenger died at Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital.

Seven of the dead were identified

as bus driver Azam, 42, and passengers Zahirul Islam, 35, Abdul Hai, 28, Monnaf Hossain, 35, Hossain Ali, 25, Shahida Begum, 24, and Shahidul, 30.

The injured were admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital while the rest to local health complex.

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Charity concert for accident victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A charity concert organised by The Daily Prothom Alo and GrameenPhone to help three accident victims from Jahangirnagar University (JU) was held in the city's Sultan Kamal Sports Complex at Dhammandi yesterday.

The fund raised from the sale of concert tickets will go into the treatment of JU students of Archaeology -- Nupur, July and Deneb -- who were seriously injured in a bus accident in India last year.

Hundreds of music lovers were enthralled by the concert as musical bands Dhaka, Daltchhoot, Bangla, Feedback and Pentagon, and singers Mehrin and Mahmuduzzaman Babu performed some of the popular songs.

Students of the Soil Science department and Microbiology department of Dhaka University also contributed Tk 40,000 and Tk 3300 for the treatment of the injured JU students.

Equipment, manpower dearth stalls DMCH burn unit shifting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At Tk 9 crore 50-bed hospital has not been able to start functioning, even though it was constructed ahead of schedule six months ago.

The delay has been caused by lack of necessary equipment and manpower; consequently, the burn unit at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) is still waiting to shift to its own new building.

Construction of the hospital

was completed mid last year and handed over to the ministry of health but, allegedly, the ministry has made no efforts to initiate the equipment ordering and manpower allocation processes.

Meanwhile, the authority at

DMCH

is forced to refuse treatment of seriously burnt patients.

According to the burn unit, approximately five patients on average seek admission everyday but DMCH has a capacity of only

eight available beds.

Despite its limitations, the unit is currently accommodating about fifty extra burn patients waiting for surgeries.

"The sooner we have the hospital in hand, the sooner we can start operations on the waiting patients," said a doctor of the unit.

The 50-bed burn hospital is expected to have four operation theatres - all of them capable of

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'Coordinated efforts needed to boost shrimp industry'

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM, from Cox's Bazar

Bangladesh can be a leader in the global shrimp industry and trade if all the stakeholders work together in a coordinated way, vice-president of the Aquaculture Certification Council (ACC) said yesterday.

The technology used in Bangladesh is of world-class. Bill More told newsmen here after visiting several hatcheries, shrimp farms and feed industries.

He visited Silvia Hatchery Ltd,

Sonargaon Shrimp Project, Niribili Hatchery Ltd, Meenhat Fisheries Ltd and Conception Sea Foods Ltd.

and expressed satisfaction over the technologies used in the factories.

"Bangladesh is ahead of Thailand by three years (in shrimp culture)," he said.

But the industry needs more investment and self-regulation for better coordination to conform to the 'international code of conduct' for the industry, now in the offing, he said.

The code of conduct will ensure food safety, fair labour management and trade practice and envi-

ronmental management in the industry.

All involved in the industry -- hatcheries, farmers, feed producers, ice makers and processors will have to work in close cooperation to compete in the international market once the code of conduct takes effect, he said.

Bill is visiting Bangladesh at the invitation of shrimp farmers' associations to apprise the stakeholders of the code of conduct.

The Seal of Quality (SOQ) Programme is already being implemented in the country to ensure

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