



Grim energy crisis looms

Captive power generation eating up gas supply; 100mw power, 100mmcf gas shortfall likely

SHARIER KHAN

An unprecedented rise in industrial and commercial demands for gas, coupled with inadequate supply, is set to trigger off an energy crisis this year.

Fed up with load-shedding, an increasing number of industrial and commercial consumers have been installing their own small-scale gas-fired power generation

units -- putting an unforeseen pressure on gas supplies.

The Power Development Board (PDB) says captive power generation capacity has reached 800 megawatts (mw) this year, up at least 250mw from 2002.

Petrobangla says gas consumption for captive power generation has shot up by 100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) over the last year to 130mmcf.

But the industrial and commercial consumers' effort to keep their wheels running with power generated by themselves may face a basic problem: there will be a shortfall in gas supply.

With no way to augment gas supply this year, the shortfall may hit 100mmcf by the year-end, with the total demand standing at over 1,400mmcf.

On the other hand, the mini-

mum power shortfall this year is expected to be 100mw, even with full supply from all the power plants, including two new power plants adding over 300mw to the national grid.

So, any accidental shutdown of a major power plant is likely to plunge the nation in partial darkness because of continuing high demand.

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Humayun Azad stabbed, struggles for life at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unknown assailants critically stabbed prominent writer Humayun Azad with butcher's knives in front of Bangla Academy last night.

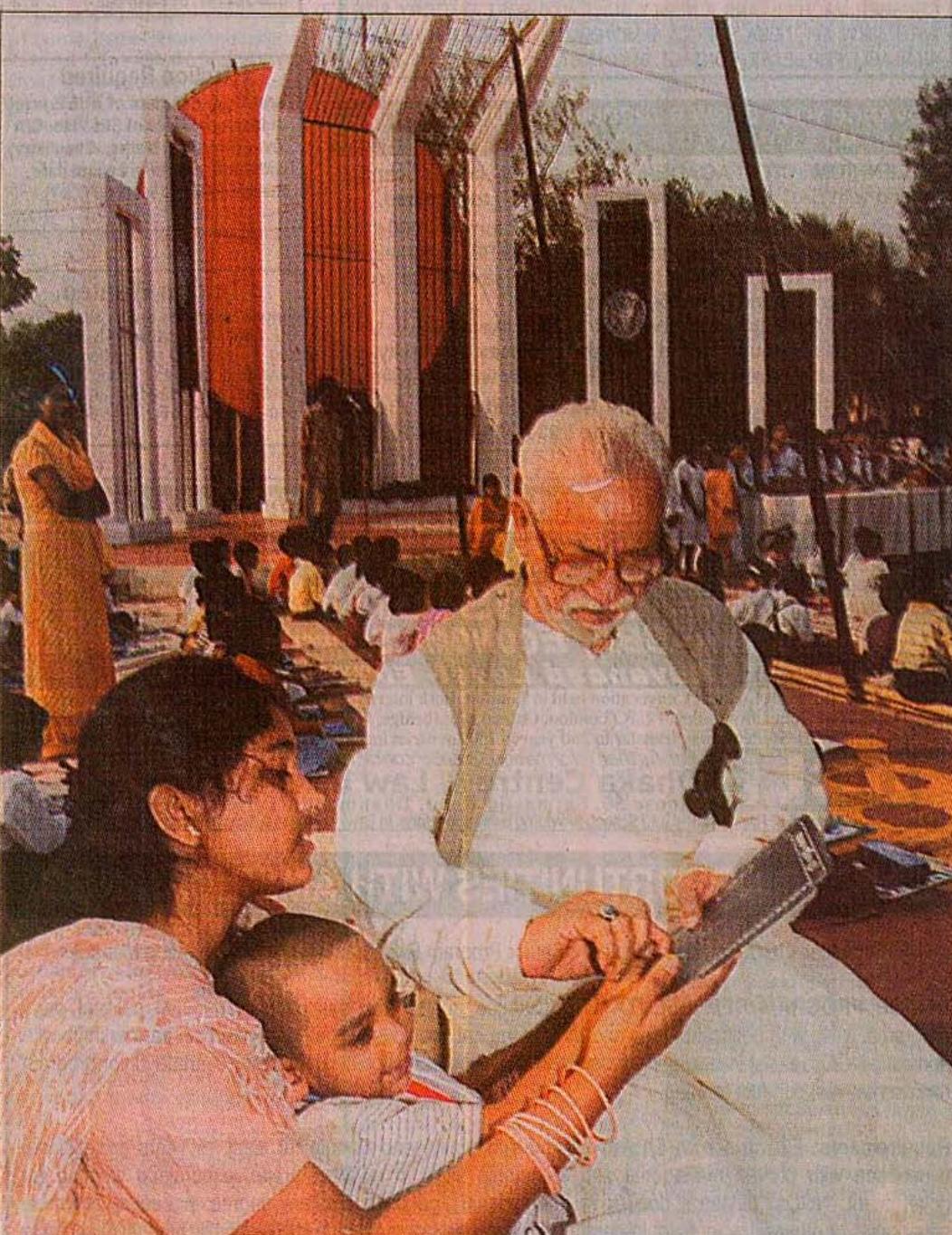
A profusely bleeding Azad, also professor of Bangla at Dhaka University, was struggling for life at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with three stabs -- one at the back of his head and two in the left side of his face. Witnesses said the gang swooped on the 56-year-old linguist when he was returning to his campus house from the Ekushey Book Fair.

"As he reached the Bangla Academy gate, four to five youths jumped on him with the knives," a DU student said.

As he cried for help, the attackers opened fire and exploded a bomb, triggering panic among the visitors to the fair who ran helter-skelter for cover.

Finding Prof Azad lying in a pool

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Language Movement veteran Gaziul Haq teaches a child how to write at a handwriting competition organised by Karak Natya Gosthi, a drama group, on the Central Shaheed Mihar premises in Dhaka yesterday.

AL, close parties plan concerted agitation

REAZ AHMAD

The Awami League's (AL) move to strike an alliance with left-leaning parties is yet to get much response, but the opposition parties are now thinking of holding simultaneous anti-government agitation.

Stirred by main opposition AL's oust-government movement and subsequent parleys with other parties, Hasanul Haq Inu-led Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Workers Party (WP) are also holding dialogues among themselves on how to give the current anti-government movement a coordinated shape.

Sources in the opposition camp said in recent weeks the AL gained a great deal of sympathy and moral support of other opposition parties because of what they said was high-handedness of the government and

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60 arrested ahead of today's hartal

Pickets damage vehicles in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Arson, arrests and bullet injuries marked the final hours to today's countrywide hartal of the main opposition Awami League (AL), a fourth in a month, amid the ruling coalition's hard line on demonstrations, processions and picketing.

Police arrested about 60 AL leaders and workers in Mymensingh and Chittagong and arsonists with alleged ties to the opposition party set fire to a human-hauler and a CNG autorickshaw in Dhaka last night.

Despite a government warning of confining opposition activists indoors, the AL remains unbent on the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown as part of its oust-the-government

movement that the ruling BNP described as a trigger in disorder.

Police arrested about 50 leaders and activists of the AL and its front organisations after cordoning the party office on Shiv Bari Road in Mymensingh district town yesterday evening, our correspondent said.

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Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in a speech to a public rally in Jatrabari hailed the report, saying:

"The report reflects the realities of Bangladesh what the Awami League has long been saying."

"It has brought to light violation of human rights under the present regime including custodial torture and deaths," said Hasina, also the president of the AL.

The government has

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Malaysia to start recruiting workers next month

RAFIQ HASAN

Fresh recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia begins next month, about five months after the signing of an agreement between the two countries.

The Malaysian government will

start receiving applications from employers on March 1 for recruiting Bangladeshi workers, the Bangladeshi High Commission in Kuala Lumpur told the Ministry of

Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment recently, official sources said.

The deal with Kuala Lumpur was signed in October last year but recruitment did not start so far mainly because of lack of preparations in the host country.

A private company in Malaysia authorised by the government will send a team to Bangladesh to appoint some local training agencies to train workers on Malaysian

language and culture, the sources said.

A high-level delegation led by Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the expatriates' welfare ministry Nazir Hossain will pay a three-day visit to Kuala Lumpur from March 5. The team will hold talks with the Malaysian government and all stakeholders to ensure transparency in the recruitment process and control migration

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Khaleda to address BNP rally in city today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) holds a rally today at Bashabo in the city that coincides with the countrywide daylong hartal enforced by main opposition Awami League (AL).

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is scheduled to address today's rally organised by Dhaka City Unit of BNP at 3pm. The last public meeting that the unit organised was at Jatrabari on February 14, another day of AL-called shutdown.

The BNP claims today's rally is but one of eight such meetings to be held in the city announced much ahead of the hartal-call.

But AL sources allege the BNP announced the programme after their hartal-call in an attempt to foil the shutdown and repress AL leaders and activists, who will be out picketing on the streets.

Positive Bangladesh
See our special story titled 'the strength within' on page 12.

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