

Fuel price hike again

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used by the poorer segments of the society have been raised, it will hurt the poor the most."

Over 90 percent of petroleum consumed in Bangladesh are diesel and kerosene. The rural people use 30 percent of the diesel and the major bulk of kerosene. Both these products are used largely in agriculture, for water pumps and transport, and thus act as a major cost factor for the country's food production and supplies.

Bakht also questioned the motive of this price hike, when the recent announcement of the new pay scale for state employees has already worsened the over 6 percent average inflation. "Apart from donors' pressure," he surmised, "it might be the case that anticipating a hike in market prices following the new budget, the finance minister wants to complete such unpleasant tasks in advance."

He suggested that the government should take measures to offset the negative impacts of this price hike.

BIDS Senior Research Fellow Dr Sazzad Zahir said, "The price hike in diesel will raise the irrigation cost. But it does not always happen so that a cost hike in irrigation brings about an increase in commodity prices."

"If the commodity price remains unchanged, then this price hike in diesel price will wholly affect the farmers, reducing their income," he pointed out, adding, "That would mean a negative impact on the rural economy."

On irrigation subsidy, Dr Zahir said, "Though the situation demands the subsidy, under the prevailing weak governance it would only add to the wide-scale corruption and misuse of the facility." "So," he said, "it would be better to keep the price of diesel

unchanged."

Energy ministry officials last night also reiterated the age-old claim that huge quantity of petroleum is 'being smuggled to India, as it is costlier there'. The government has been presenting this argument time and again since 1991, when a litre of petrol cost Tk 13.

"Today, the price of diesel in India is Tk 41 a litre, petrol Tk 57 and octane Tk 65," said one of them. However he did not say anything when it was pointed out to him that the newly adjusted prices still leave enough profit margin for 'smuggling'.

After coming to office, the BNP-led coalition government first increased the prices of kerosene, diesel, petrol and octane on December 27, 2001. That time, the prices of kerosene and diesel were increased by Tk 2 per litre to Tk 17, petrol to Tk 28 from Tk 23 and octane to Tk 30 from Tk 25. It also increased the price of jet fuel a couple of times.

Until December last, the government increased the price of diesel thrice, kerosene four times, and petrol and octane twice.

The government last increased the price of diesel and kerosene by Tk 3 a litre in January this year. That time it also increased the price of gas.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been hammering on the government to increase the petroleum prices, making it a condition for their Development Support Credit-3 and Poverty Reduction Growth Facility loans.

Disbursement of both the loans has remained suspended, as the government did not increase petroleum prices and fulfil some other conditions. Yesterday's price hike will allow Bangladesh to get these loans next month, sources said.

RU JCD men block highway for 2 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Activists of Rajshahi University Jatiyatadhi Chhatra Dal unit barricaded the Rajshahi-Dhaka highway near Kallia for two hours yesterday to get a Rajshahi University teacher's motorbike released.

At around 5:00pm a traffic sergeant Golam Morshed seized a RU teacher, Ariful Dolon's bike alleging that he was not carrying any valid documents. Dolon, a teacher of the Institute of Business Studies, went to the campus and informed the JCD leaders about the incident. Rafiqul Islam, a former RU JCD organising secretary along with other JCD activists Romel, Miran, Shafin went to the local police station and demanded release of the bike. Being refused the activists put up logs on the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway, interrupting traffic movements for the next two hours. At around 7:30pm, Rapid Action Battalion members with the help from the local police station finally managed to drive the agitators away and brought back order. Akram Hossain, officer in charge of Mithar police station, told that the agitating students withdrew the siege after RU Proctor Shamsul Islam assured them of immediate release of the bike.

She said the more the government is getting alienated from the people because of its misrule, the more it is increasing its persecution

Illegal operation

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survey certificates. The team led by Abdur Rahim also arrested eight employees of those vessels.

"They would be released if the owner of the vessels pay the fine. Otherwise, they would be sentenced to up to two years," Rahim told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday evening.

He said they also inspected two passenger launches but did not find any faults.

The other team led by Magistrate Fazlur Rahman raided Narayanganj area and seized six vessels. Of those, one vessel was fined Tk 30,000 and the other five Tk 20,000 each. Employees of two of the vessels claimed to have survey certificates and registration but could not produce those at that time.

The government launched the clampdown on river vessels with a view to ensuring discipline and order in the shipping sector following a series of launch disasters in the country, said sources.

On the first day, 30 cargo vessels were seized and fined for plying the waterways without necessary documents.

HC asks EC

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chairman or director.

"We have filed the petition in the interest of the public. We want voters to cast their votes on the basis of correct information. If people do not know about the candidates, it will create scopes for law-breakers to become lawmakers," Advocate Abdul Momen Chowdhury, one of the three petitioners, told reporters.

"Since the court has accepted our prayer, it is now the responsibility of the EC to decide how it will inform the public the whereabouts of the candidates," he added.

The two other petitioners are Advocate KM Zahir and Advocate Zahurul Islam. Dr Kamal Hossain moved the petition along with Abdul Momen Chowdhury.

Bloated ADP

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The ADP has been revised down to Tk 20,500 crore. The local currency component has been reduced by Tk 100 crore from the original while the foreign component by Tk 1,400 crore.

The non-ADP development funds of the current fiscal year have been increased to Tk 993 crore from Tk 860 crore.

Nazrul

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The programmes include placing of wreaths at the poet's grave on the premises of Dhaka University Mosque, discussions, rallies and cultural functions.

Born on this day in 1899 at village Churulia of 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, India, Nazrul through his powerful poems had inspired the people to fight against injustice and repression of the colonial rule.

The fearless voice of the poet also earned him the wrath of the British rulers who had jailed him several times for igniting people's desire for independence through his poems.

Nazrul's songs and poems were also great sources of inspiration for freedom fighters during the Liberation War in 1971.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina paid glowing tributes to the late national poet on the occasion of his birthday.

SCBA mulls

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ban vis-à-vis their movement against controversial judge Faisal Mahmud Faizee and other issues.

Since the ban applies to the agitation focussed on Faizee and the Supreme Court itself, the lawyers viewed that it was time for agitation against the government, as it is responsible for politicising the judge appointment process.

They resolved that a final decision will be taken at another meeting scheduled for late last night and the decision will be made public through a press conference today.

Hasina says Aziz

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"They are killing popular Awami League leaders across the country. They are carrying out their brutal oppression."

Hasina referred to the major grenade and bomb attacks in the country during the reign of the present government and said, "The perpetrators are not being nabbed because the government high-ups are involved in those heinous crimes."

Turning to the recent launch disasters, she said the government is doing nothing to save the victims. "Even the bodies are not being handed over to the families."

Hasina went to see Mohammad Wares Ali, general secretary of Meherpur district unit of Awami Krishak League, the peasants' unit of the AL, at the National Orthopaedics Hospital. Wares's mother and wife broke down in tears seeing Hasina at their side.

Assailants attacked and critically wounded Wares while he was returning home at Bidyadharpur from a party programme at Meherpur on May 18.

Hasina then visited Bhupesh Barua, a Raozan Chhatra League leader who is receiving treatment at the same hospital.

She then went to Mirpur National Heart Foundation to see Aminuzzaman, brother-in-law of her cousin Sheikh Shahidul Islam.

New CEC also wants

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in 1996 and confirmed by the Awami League government. There was no objection against him.

He said those who have rejected his appointment are entitled to their own opinion and it is their political right to oppose the appointment.

"I do not think there should be any agitation or wrong impression aligning me that I am biased to any political party. I am everybody's man...I am nobody's man," Aziz told the journalists yesterday at his office.

He said lawyers protested the appointment of the then CEC when he had gone to the Supreme Court premises to take oath. But nobody demonstrated against his appointment on Monday when he went to take oath, the CEC said.

"I will not go beyond the dictates of the constitution, my conscience and (my duty towards) welfare of the country," the CEC said in a desperate bid to pacify the opposition.

Referring to the participation of

of the opposition.

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the main opposition Awami League in the Narsingdi-1 by-elections slated for June 22, which will be his first test, Aziz said, "I am very happy to know that the main opposition party will join the by-election. It shows that they have accepted me."

He said the EC would try its best to see that the elections are free and fair. "(My) shoulders are very small, but the burden is huge," the CEC said about his duties.

FIRST WORKING DAY

CEC Aziz yesterday entered his office at 9:00am and three election commissioners Shafiqur Rahman, M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali called on him immediately afterwards. Officials at the EC secretariat called on him in the afternoon.

The CEC said he received a few phone calls from his former colleagues and friends to congratulate him. But no political leaders rang him up to congratulate him, he added.

Private firm in talks

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The cost is estimated at US\$ 974 million.

The consortium, may be based in a neutral country in the Far East, will buy gas from Myanmar and sell it to principal buyer India. In Bangladesh, it will engage GTCL, a subsidiary company of Petrobangla, for maintenance and security of the pipeline within Bangladesh territory.

Ahmed said the tri-nation energy ministers' meeting, held in Yangon on January 12-13, decided among other things that the pipeline will be built, owned and operated by an international consortium company and hoped that the three nations would soon sign an MOU to this effect.

In reply to a query, he said MHL has got the approval from both the Myanmar and the Indian authorities to buy gas from Myanmar and sell it to India. MHL now requires approval from the Bangladesh authorities to have access to the Right of Way (ROW) through the Bangladesh territory.

Ahmed said there are two route options for the pipeline through Bangladesh through the Rakhine Coast. One route proposed earlier will go through Patlwa and Aijwal in Mizoram through Tripura and enter Bangladesh at Brahmanbaria crossing the Jamuna River and pass by Jessore to enter West Bengal at Bongaon.

The second route will be to enter Bangladesh at Teknaf along the coast to Feni through Brahmanbaria where a spur-line from Tripura can be connected with the gas fields of Tripura. The crossing of Jamuna River to Jessore and Bongaon segment will remain unchanged.

An economically feasible route would be recommended in the project report to be prepared by the consortium company, he told reporters.

On economic and social benefits, Ahmed said if the pipeline is drawn through Bangladesh it would bring an investment of US\$ 350-600 million for Bangladesh segment.

He said Bangladesh government might receive some US\$ 100 million a year as wheeling charges depending on the volume of gas transmitted and distance covered within Bangladesh territory.

In addition to the cost of Right of Way (cost of land), GTCL may receive about US\$ 24 million a year for their services.

Ahmed, however, would not comment on the conditions set by Bangladesh to India for installing the pipeline through Bangladesh territory.

Ghalib remanded

UNB, Sirajganj

A court here yesterday placed four people, including Dr Asadullah Al Galib, leader of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen, on a three-day remand in the Ullapara Grameen Bank blast case.

Police produced Galib, Secretary of Jama'atul Mujahideen Nurul Islam, Organising Secretary Abdus Salam Salafi and librarian of Atrai Agran Degree College ASM Azizullah before the Court of First Magistrate, seeking a 10-day remand.

After hearing the case, the court granted three days' remand for the accused.

Investigating Officer (IO) ASP Abdus Sobhan of Shahjadpur Circle will interrogate them during the remand.

Galib was brought to Sirajganj from Gaibandha district jail, while three others from Naogaon jail.

Three bombs were exploded at the Ullapara branch of Grameen Bank on February 16 this year, injuring four people and damaging important documents of the bank.

16 fall sick

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unconscious state. All of them regained consciousness by 4:30pm. Of them, 13 were released from the hospital while three others will have to stay for at least another day, said Dr Purnendu Saha of CMCH yesterday evening.

Sources and relatives said after the marriage ceremony on Monday night, some members of the bridal party went to bride's house at Kattail. There they went to sleep at around 3:30am on completion of a few more rituals.

The incident of poisoning became known at around 6:00am when members of a band party, which played music during the ceremony, went into the house for tips. Despite repeated knocks on the main gate, none of the family members responded from inside, said sources.

After a few minutes, the band party members scaled the boundary wall and entered the house. They found the 16 lying unconscious in the rooms of the single-storey building. With the help of locals, they immediately took the victims to the CMCH.

The cause of the gas poisoning could not be known till filing this report at 7:00pm last night. Jharna Saha, a member of the bride's family, said that she suspects someone from outside might have sprayed poisonous gas in the rooms. Another source however said it could be an accident poisoning resulted from malfunctioning of a generator.

"The incident happened soon after the generator was switched on following a power failure," she told The Daily Star.

Police were not informed of the matter till yesterday evening.

Illegal Bangladeshi

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the neighbour," Patil told reporters in Mumbai.

"This campaign may also hurt Bangla-speaking population in the country, particularly from West Bengal," Patil said, adding that it was the job of the state police to identify illegal immigrants and repatriate them.

The issue of illegal immigrants was discussed at a meeting he had with chief ministers of Gujarat and Maharashtra, sources said.

However, while talking to reporters, Patil maintained silence on the issue discussed at the meeting.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Viasrao Deshmukh, his Gujarat counterpart Narendra Modi, Goa Governor S C Jamir and central and state home department officials attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, about 500 activists of All Assam Minority Students' Association (AMSA) were arrested in northeastern state of Assam when they tried to enforce a day-long bandh (strike) which affected normal life in certain areas.

AMSA called the strike to protest against the "quit" notice issued to suspected Bangladeshi migrants by some youth organisations.

Kibria killing case

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The rule came upon a writ petition filed on May 14 by the four accused - Shahed Ali, Jamir Ali, Joynal Abedin Mumin and Tazul Islam. They claimed that they had been forced to make the confessional statement.

The petitioners are among the 10 accused in the charge-sheet. They had made confessional statements to a magistrate about their involvement in the murder of Kibria, killed in the January 27 grenade attack in Habiganj.

In the petition, eight high government officials including the home secretary, inspector general of police (IGP) and IG (Prisons) have been made respondents.

The petitioners' counsel Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia yesterday told reporters that the four accused had been put on remand for 45 days and tortured brutally, both physically and mentally, to make the confessional statements.

They were also threatened that if they did not give the statement they would be killed in "crossfire" with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Mia said. He alleged the accused were forced to sign on a white paper.

The four had pleaded for retraction of their confessional statements several times in the Habiganj court, but were rejected, Mia said.

Former finance minister and AL lawmaker Kibria and four others were killed in a grenade attack at a public rally in Baiderbagh, Habiganj on January 27. Abdul Majid Khan, a district AL leader, filed two cases in connection with the incident.

The charge-sheets for both the cases accused 10 BNP men including these four.

Car bombs kill 8 GIs

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a town 80km west of the northern city of Mosul, police said yesterday, hours after two car bombs killed at least 20 people there late Monday.

Separately, gunmen opened fire on a four-car convoy carrying conservative Shia legislator Salamah al-Khafaji, one of the most prominent women in Iraq's new parliament. The lawmaker escaped unharmed, but four of her bodyguards were critically injured.

The US military announced that a two-day operation involving more than 2,000 Iraqi soldiers and police the largest-ever joint campaign in the Baghdad area had rounded up 428 suspected insurgents.

But insurgents continued to wreak havoc in the capital despite the ongoing crackdown in the Abu Ghraib area, which targets militants believed responsible for multiple attacks on the US-detention facility there and the road linking downtown to the international airport.

Residents called police about a suspicious-looking car parked opposite the Dillah Junior High School for Girls in Alwiyah, near eastern Baghdad's well-known Withaq Square, a Christian neighbourhood. As bomb disposal experts approached the vehicle, it exploded and killed six bystanders,

Satkhira bigots

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(IKNMB). In the face of police action, IKNMB Nayeib-e-Amir Nur Hossain Nurani called the rally but called on his men to assemble at the same place at 5:00pm.

Addressing the Kashmiri rally, IKNMB leaders threatened to attack the Ahmadiyyas again if a case filed against IKNMB leaders is not withdrawn by May 30.

They demanded that a signboard, which they posted on the Ahmadiyya complex with police assistance on April 17, be hung again also by May 30. The signboard read: 'A place of worship for the Ahmadiyya Community, Sundarban Bazar' and advised Muslims not to mistake the place for a mosque.

The Khatme Nabuwat leaders, who had already cancelled the June 1 programme of laying siege to local Ahmadiyya complex, claimed that 106 Ahmadiyyas were converted to Muslims yesterday and a grand rally will be held at Syed Salauddin Chatter on May 31 to accord them a reception.

Religious bigots on April 17 attacked Ahmadiyyas at Sundarban Bazar Shyamnagar, injuring over 50 people, including women and children, and looted at least 10 houses.

Following the attack, Ahmadiyyas filed a case with the Shyamnagar Police Station.

The religious bigots also held a rally Kaliganj Fultala at 3:00pm the same day, urging police to observe the duties of a Muslim and not to protect Ahmadiyyas as "they are the enemies of Islam".

Addressing the rally, Nurani said: "Police have violated the constitution as well as Islam by trying to prevent them from holding rally."

He claimed that they were holding rallies in Satkhira with prior permission from the home ministry.

The civil society members under the banner of Samprodayeek Sampriti Committee will hold a rally tomorrow at Shaheed Abdur Razzak Road. Justice KM Sobhan will preside over the rally.

3 killed

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Dhaka bound passenger bus, in an attempt to save a cow, collided with a brick laden truck, police and witnesses said.

Abdus Salam, 38, a teacher of the Kashor High School and Quddus, 45, a member of the Kachina UP, succumbed to their injuries while being carried to hospital. The other dead could not be identified.

Critically injured Sirajul Islam, 45, Suruj, 40, Saiful, 46, Idris, 34, Monir, 25, Saleha, 32 and 15 others were admitted to different local hospitals and clinics.

Cops nab 566

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The special detective police team Cobra caught the remaining 203 people.

THE CRIME WAVE
At least 10 incidents of robbery were recorded in Mirpur area from end of April to date, when robbers looted Tk 10 lakh in cash and valuables and hurt two city dwellers, police sources said.

Robbers knifed primary school headmistress Talukdar Shahnaj Kabir Lily to death and looted cash and gold worth about Tk 5.17 lakh from her Harirampur house in Uttara on April 17.

On April 1, robbers looted cash, gold and valuables to the tune of Tk 7 lakh from Shyamspur residence of Police Sub-Inspector Abdus Sattar posted at Keraniganj.

A gang of robbers stabbed Nasima Akhter, wife of a police havildar, at their house on Ullapara Road in Khilgaon on May 20.

In Demra, a gang of six shot Mohammed Jasim, as he shouted for help seeing the robbers cutting the window grills of his house on May 19.

said police Capt. Husham Ismael.

Three civilians and one policeman also were injured; none of the school's students were believed to be among the casualties.

At least 620 people, including 52 US troops, have been killed since April 28, when Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari announced his new Shia-dominated government. Washington hopes his government will eventually train police and an army capable of securing Iraq, allowing the withdrawal of coalition troops.

Many of Monday's attacks appeared to target the majority Shia community whose representatives won a majority in January's landmark general elections and who now lead the coalition government.

The bloodiest attack came late Monday when two suicide drivers ploughed into a crowd in the northern town of Tall Afar, killing at least 35 people.

The double attack took place "a few minutes after mortar bombs were fired at two houses in the Muallimin district of Tall Afar," according to Abdel Ghani al Yahia, an official with the Kurdistan Democratic Party, one of two political factions which control the northern Kurdish provinces.

"Local people gathered at the site to help... and two car bombs then rushed in and exploded," he added.

At least 25 people were also wounded in the attack in Muallimin, a majority Shia and Turkmen area of Tall Afar, a town 400km north of the capital.

Another 11 people were killed and 11 wounded, many of them children, when a car bomb exploded outside a Shia prayer room in Mahmudiya, a lawless ethnically-mixed town in an area just south of Baghdad dubbed the Triangle of Death.

CONTEMPT CHARGES Judge,Shoaib, PP apologise to High Court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court judge, the public prosecutor (PP) and the sacked managing director (MD) of Inqilab TV appeared in person before the High Court to face contempt charges yesterday and tendered unqualified apologies for the offence.

The High Court Division Bench of justices Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Emdadul Haq Azad on May 16 issued a suo moto contempt rule on the three after the sacked MD was granted bail in a sedition case in the lower court while the matter was pending with the High Court.

They were asked to appear in person before the court yesterday.

Judge Mohammad Shamsul Alam Khan of the Court of First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge, Dhaka, PP Abdullah Mahmud Hassan and MD Salauddin Shoaib Chowdhury went to the High Court and stood in the dock for about two hours.

The judge and the PP in a written statement offered their unconditional apology, while Shoaib verbally apologised to the court.

The court gave Shoaib until June 20 to file a written apology and all the three to personally appear before the same day.

The metropolitan sessions judge's court granted bail to Shoaib on April 30 in a sedition case upon a bond of Tk 1 lakh with four guarantors. The PP did not oppose the bail petition despite being the prosecution lawyer since the case was filed on January 24 last year.

During hearing on the bail petition, PP Hassan had told the court that he would have no objection to the bail move since the court grants bail with proper guarantors.

On April 2, the same court rejected the bail petition of the accused on the ground that the charges brought against him had been primarily proved. The prosecution had also opposed the bail petition, saying Shoaib through his activities had offended the religious sentiments of Muslims.