

Power-outage-free Ctg looks bleak

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

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Saturday's power disaster has once again exposed the vulnerability of sustainable electricity supply as well as the capability of age-old equipment of the Power Development Board (PDB) in Chittagong region.

Even worst, any possibility to get rid of the recurring crisis in near future is also bleak as the Tk 733 crore Greater Chittagong Power Distribution Project (Third Phase), which already missed deadline many a time, was progressing at a snail's pace.

Most of the 17 substations in Chittagong are operating with age-old transformers and flagging transmission lines for which recurrence of the power crisis has long been a common sight.

"The transformers and transmission lines of the substations here are aged between 25 to 30 years and they are compelled to take overload, posing risks," said a top PDB official seeking anonymity.

He said such backdated transformers are now used hardly anywhere in the world.



(Right) Engineers repair a transformer at the Khulshi Grid Sub-station in Chittagong after two transformers of the sub-station went out of order on Saturday, causing power outage in a vast area for more than 10 hours. (Left) A view of the sub-station.



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As per rule, a transformer is supposed to take around 10 to 20 percent less load than its capacity for proper functioning of the transformer as well as to avoid any damage to it, sources said.

"But at the backdrop of increasing demand for power everyday, the PDB in Chittagong has no alternative to allowing additional load and this is one of the main reasons of recurring power trouble," they said.

Chief Engineer Quazi Bashiruddin Ahmed, admitting the fact, said it depends on the implementation of the Third Phase Project to have uninterrupted power supply in this region.

The helplessness of PDB was seen in the latest accident on July 23 at the Khulshi Grid Sub Station when two transformers experienced trouble at around 2.00pm, plunging about 20 lakh people under five major substations -- Stadium, Patharghata, Bakalia, Jalalabad and Muradpur -- without electricity for more than ten hours.

It was the worst power disaster in the last 15 years after the

one in 1991, caused by the catastrophic cyclonic storm and tidal surge on the nightmarish night of April 29.

This year, so far, the people here experienced five such severe outages due to technical faults either of the transformers or transmission lines, sources said.

The PDB officials, meantime, look eagerly on the implementation of Greater Chittagong Third Phase Project and believe the Chittagong Region would be free of the power crisis once the project becomes a reality.

The Tk 369.98 crore project was taken in the fiscal year 1992-1993 scheduled to end in 1998-1999.

The project had missed all its deadlines and a revised project worth Tk 733.50 crore was adopted in 2000, sources said.

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project on September 19 in 2000 and the Kuwait Fund agreed to provide Tk 230 crore of the total cost.

PDB sources, however, are sceptical about the completion of the project within its latest deadline, 2006, as major 'realistic' work is yet to start.

ATTACK ON JOURNALIST

Memo to PM seeking justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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The Chittagong journalists, in a memorandum to the prime minister (PM) on Monday, demanded justice after a fair investigation into the incident of attack on a journalist that took place at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) on Thursday.

In the memorandum, they also sought the PM's intervention to put an end to repeated incidents of attack on journalists, harassment of patients and their relatives as well as vandalism and corruption practised by a handful of intern doctor at the hospital.

The memorandum was submitted by the Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ) and Chittagong Metropolitan Union of Journalists (CMUJ) through the deputy commissioner of Chittagong as part of a pre-announced 3-day agitation programme.

The journalist unions also submitted separate memorandum to the health minister and

the state minister for home affairs.

The memorandum was signed by CMUJ President Shamsul Haq Haidary and General Secretary Mohammad Shahnowaz, CUJ President Mostaque Ahmed, and General Secretary Shahid Ullah.

Zahid Al Amin, a staff reporter of the Noya Diganta, came under an attack allegedly by some intern doctors and staffs while talking to the relatives of a severely burnt patient at CMCH on Thursday.

The patient Hosne Ara succumbed to her injury, reportedly due to lack of proper treatment, at the hospital on Saturday night.

Protesting the case filed in connection with the attack on the journalist, the handful intern doctor yesterday staged a demonstration on the CMCH premises and barred the patients from receiving treatment from outdoor and hampered indoor service of the hospital as well.

No policy yet on ship breaking

ABDULLAH -AL MAHMUD

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The importance of the potential ship breaking sector is declining fast for lack of policy to make it an industry.

Besides, absence of specific rules has created a scope for violation of human rights and massive environment pollution in the coastal area to benefit only a vested syndicate, sources said.

Experts emphasised a collective effort by the government and non-government organisations as well as local pressure groups to formulate a policy to make the ship breaking an industry.

Some 20 ship breaking yards developed along some 8-km stretch of the coastal area from Sitakunda to Bhatary, where some 70 companies were operative in the sector in the eighties, sources said.

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), a social development organisation based in the coastal area of Sitakunda, in its survey revealed that ship scrapping trade was immensely contributing to the country's economy, earning annual revenue of over Tk 900 crore. It met around 90 per cent of the demand for construction materials, including rod, steel and iron and created jobs for around 2.50 lakh people in the eighties, the survey report said.

The trade also helped some 20 forward and backward linkage industries to develop, centering it, the report added.

But the sector mysteriously remained as an untouched and unknown one, it said.

The number of operational companies in the ship breaking yards comes down to some 19

prised 75.85 per cent of the workforce, were deprived of labour facilities under an undeclared rule "no work no pay" in the yards, they said.

YPSA officials said due to lack of specific rules, human rights is seriously violated in ship breaking yards when accidents cause huge loss of life frequently.

Economist Professor Dr Moinul Islam of Chittagong University (CU) said contribution of ship breaking trade

Absence of specific rules in ship breaking sector has created a scope for violation of human rights and massive environment pollution in the coastal area to benefit only a vested syndicate

from 70. It can now hardly meet 55 per cent of the total demand of construction materials. Appointment of labourers with poor wages and vulnerable labour conditions featured in the ship breaking yards where access of general public was prohibited, YPSA sources said.

Poverty stricken people of northern districts, who com-

could be more than what was estimated in terms of annual revenue earning.

But, non-recognition and criminal activities by a vested quarter are ruining this sector, he added.

Md. Saiful Karim of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) said the absence of specific rules created scope for bring-



Ship breaking yard workers are at high risk of fatal accidents.

ZOBAER HOSSAIN SKIDER

ing ships in a hazardous state, obtaining certificates without survey and dismantling without making them gas or sludge-free properly.

The Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, 1989 is also not being followed, he added.

Meanwhile, the participants at

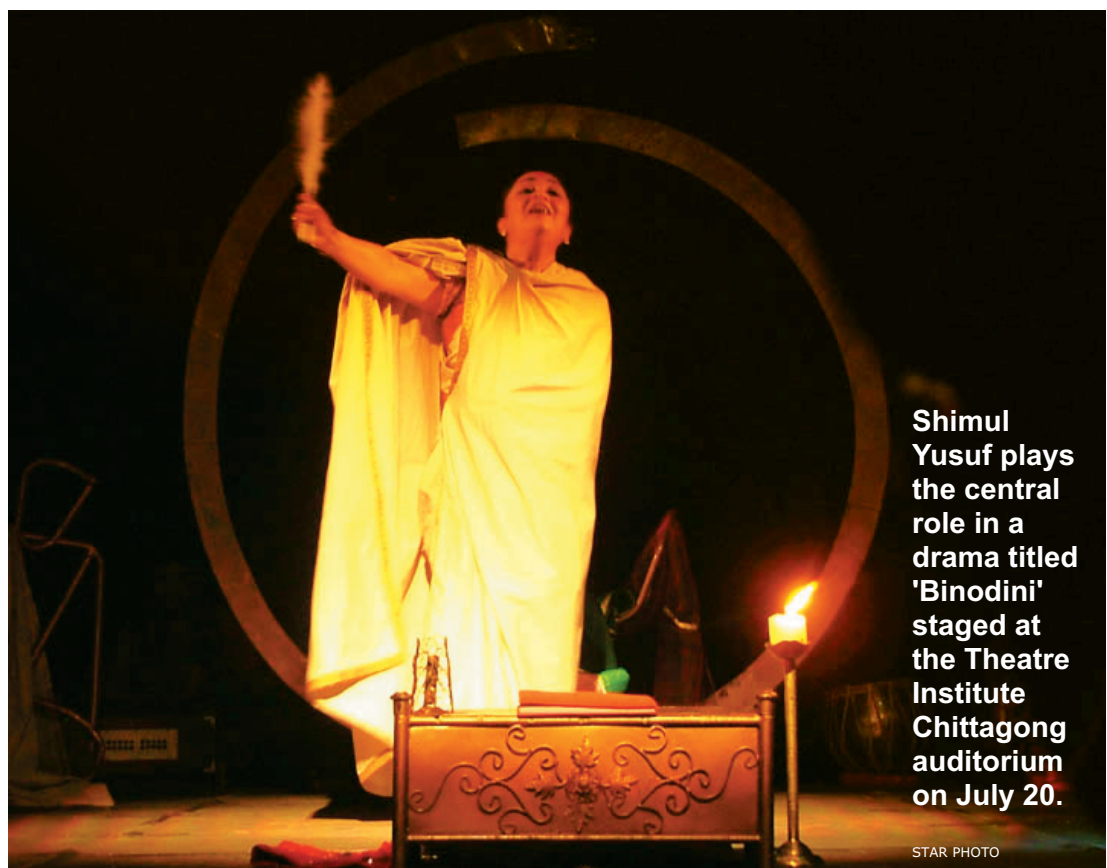
a roundtable titled, "Advocacy for a Public Policy to Ensure Human Rights in Ship Breaking Industry" on Wednesday emphasised a policy to free the sector from the clutches of vested syndicates.

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) and the Bengali daily Bhorer Kagoj organised the roundtable in collaboration with Manusher Jonno at the Chittagong Stock Exchange

conference hall.

The speakers said the sector has all the reasons to be recognised as an industry and run under the ministry of industry.

But under the clutches of a vested syndicate it can not get the recognition of an industry, they added.



Shimul Yusuf plays the central role in a drama titled 'Binodini' staged at the Theatre Institute Chittagong auditorium on July 20.

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A school making a difference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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Kafco Fertilizer Company (Kafco), one of the leading multi-national companies in Bangladesh, is running a distinctive educational institute in the port city.

The institute named Kafco School and College (KSC) is known for its teacher-student relationship concept and conspicuous teaching style.

The institute got a modern shape after a massive reform at the initiative of newly appointed Kafco Managing Director Dr Peter Allen Ma.

KSC provides the students with books, pens and dresses as well as offers free-studentship in some cases.

With a view to offering quality education to the children of Kafco officials and employees, the institute was set up on the

(Left) Students at the science class at the Kafco School. (Right) Kafco MD Peter Allen Ma.

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Kafco premises in 1995 amid the picturesque beauty of Rangadia - just on the other bank of the river Karnaphuli.

KSC has marked a rapid progress for its systemic and disciplined method of teaching, including regular class tests and close monitoring by the teachers.

Peter said "We have reformed the institute with a view to offering a better education to the students so that they can grow as worthy citizens. We want to train them up as skilled manpower so that they can contribute to the country and bring in a positive change in the society."

The Kafco, which was previously a losing company, has turned into a profit-making organisation during the last 18 months.

A group of journalists visited the school.

The school has a good educational environment free from politics. Regular classes

and the most disciplined atmosphere made the institute different from others.

Besides, the authorities also put a great emphasis on co-curriculum activities like sports, scouting, handicrafts, debate, dance and songs in the institute.