

## Plan for 2-day holiday

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increased by Tk 25 to Tk 475.

This is the eighth time the present government has hiked petroleum prices since coming to power in October 2001. However, it had never increased the prices of all the 10 different types of petroleum simultaneously in the past.

"The first reason for the hike is that the price of oil has skyrocketed internationally," said Mahmudur Rahman. "The second reason is, the BPC continues to count loss like last year. If we had not increased the price, the BPC loss this year would have come to Tk 4000 crore. But now this loss will decrease by Tk 1700 crore."

Mahmudur added that the BPC had historically made losses but gave a lot of import duties which was considered as profit. "But last year, the BPC loss exceeded the amount of duties it paid for the first time. The BPC made a loss of Tk 2700 crore while it paid Tk 2400 crore as duties," he said.

"The third reason is, import of oil is also creating heavy pressure on the foreign currency reserve. The price hike will now force people to be frugal with oil use, which will ultimately reduce the pressure on the reserve," he said.

Mahmudur observed that the new price level has come close to that in India. "In the past, higher oil

price in India encouraged smuggling of oil [from Bangladesh]. Now this will not happen and as a result, the overall import of oil of Bangladesh will decrease," he said.

"Besides there was pressure on the government from the donors to increase the price," Mahmudur added. "Even after this hike, we will still have to subsidise diesel and kerosene by Tk 11 per litre. However, we will not have to subsidise petrol and octane as the BPC's cost of petrol and octane is Tk 42 per litre," he pointed out.

Energy ministry proposals In its proposal, the energy ministry recommended a two-day weekly holiday. The high number of government motor vehicles contribute significantly to the high demand for petroleum. A two-day weekly holiday will cut down one day's transport expense for government staff, the proposal said.

The ministry also suggested closing of all shops except drug stores and restaurants after 8:00pm everyday.

After 10:00pm, all neon signs and billboards should be shut down. Illumination of public places should be barred.

Finally, the government should encourage the government institutions to use energy saving lights.

## Lawmakers fail

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committee members. He ended the meeting without any fruitful result.

The AL lawmakers at the meeting accused the speaker of making the parliament and the committee "dysfunctional" by his "negative attitude". They also questioned the need to continue the system of private members' bills.

"The system should be scrapped if the private members' bills are not allowed to be placed in the House," AL representative of the committee and lawmaker Shawkat Ali told the speaker.

The speaker told the lawmakers that the ruling party lawmakers were asked to consult with the prime minister before piloting any private members' bills.

Otherwise, they might face the Article 70, losing their memberships in the House, sources said quoting the speaker.

Talking to The Daily Star, committee member and BNP lawmaker Sardar Shakawat Hossain Bakul also echoed the same view.

According to the definition of the private members' bills in the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad, any lawmaker who is not a member of the cabinet will be entitled to place in parliament any bill which will be considered as private members' bills. The House will decide the fate of the bills whether those will be passed or be rejected.

The lawmakers who submitted private members' bills proposing formulation of different laws, including amendment to the constitution, have been frustrated as their bills are not being placed in parliament. This has prompted the committee to stop scrutinising any new bill since last January.

Sticking to its position, the committee at yesterday's meeting did not discuss any new bill. Following the meeting, the members led by its chairman met the speaker at his office in a bid to resolve the crisis.

The committee's recommendations to parliament, made by six separate reports, for passage and tabling of 14 bills, including 11 for amendment to the constitution, have been being ignored since 2002.

The speaker asked the officials concerned to seek permission from the law, justice and parliamentary affairs minister whether or not these 11 bills will be placed in parliament. The law minister gave the permission on April 20, 2004 but the speaker did not initiate any further steps, sources at the parliament secretariat said.

The amendment bills to the constitution were first submitted to the parliament secretariat and then sent to the parliamentary body for scrutiny. The other bills were sent to the committee for scrutiny after being placed in parliament and it recommended for passage.

The lawmakers submitted a total of 54 bills that were sent to the parliamentary body for scrutiny.

The government in its own initiative passed two bills—one for formation of an anti corruption commission and the other, an amendment bill to constitution, for reintroducing women reserved seats in parliament. The lawmakers had placed similar bills long ago before the government offices.

The government has so far passed one private members' bill in the current parliament to repeal a law on displaying the portrait of Bangabandhu at different government and semi-government offices.

## Transport fare

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transport fare, said Seraj, also a BNP lawmaker.

He said fare should be increased by at least 30 per cent to keep the transport sector operative.

The association will hold an emergency meeting this morning to chalk out a charter of demands to be placed before the government, Searj told The Daily Star.

He however pointed out that the government has many options like reducing duty on import of tyres and tubes of buses and trucks to give incentive to transport owners.

Bangladesh Truck Malik Samity last night expressed deep concern over the price increase of all kinds of fuel and blamed the government for this.

Tofazzal Hossain and Rustum Ali Khan, president and general secretary of the samity, in a joint statement said the government pushed the transport sector toward a stagnation by raising fuel price twice in last three months.

The fuel price hike will not only hit transport sector but will also have a negative impact on the production of essentials including rice, consequently raising their prices, the statement said.

The samity has called an emergency meeting on Wednesday at Teigaon truck terminal to discuss the situation and an action plan to face it.

Shahajan Khan, executive president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation, said transport sector could not survive without increasing the fare following fresh price rise of fuel.

Fare should be increased on the basis of increased fuel cost, he added.

Bangladesh Petroleum Dealers Association said fuel price rise will also increase cost of living and have a negative impact on the national economy.

Abdur Rahman and Syed Sajjadul Karim Kabul, president and general secretary of the association, in a joint statement said although the rise in fuel price was effective from yesterday, its supply to fuel stations was stopped Saturday afternoon, creating serious problems. Long queues of vehicles were seen in front of all fuel stations on Saturday afternoon, they mentioned.

Our Rangamati correspondent reported that transport fair in different routes of the district has gone up due to increased fuel price.

In the district town, the fare hike is about 20 per cent.

## More blasts feared

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a meeting on law and order.

Mentioning a report of a Bangla daily on the union, Babar said he himself had received reports about this.

Asked whether the government is suspecting a joint attack by the groups, the state minister said, "Yes, there is apprehension. We're never saying that there is no alarm and no-one should say that. There is an alarm and we're taking preparation for that."

The crackdown on three Islamist outfits -- the JMB, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai-led Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB) and Dr Asadullah Al Galib-led Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh (Ahab) -- and Abdur Rashid alias Tapan Malitha-led Janajuddha led to the union, the agency reported.

Tapan was enraged and bent on revenge after some of his followers including his younger brother were killed in 'crossfire'. Bangla Bhai was also furious as a number of JMJB men were arrested after he went into hiding last year.

After the arrest of Galib and banning of the JMJB and JMB on February 23 and subsequent arrests of the JMB, JMJB and Ahab men, they planned an attack to frighten the government and show off their strength, according to the agency.

The report however confirmed Janajuddha was not involved in the August 17 explosions and blamed it on the JMB following seizures of leaflets and confession of its activists.

The home ministry in the wake of the report yesterday to beef up security in Dhaka and elsewhere. It ordered the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to conduct constant raid on slums and criminal dens and asked other agencies to initiate operation to arrest listed criminals.

Babar also asked owners of different markets who are yet to

install closed-circuit television (CCTV) to set up the CCTV immediately.

**AUGUST 17 PROBE**

The government yesterday claimed the progress of probe is satisfactory.

"Besides arresting filed-level operatives, we've arrested some second-grade ones," Babar told reporters.

"In some districts, we've traced the total process -- how the bombing took place and who were involved. We've arrested a good number of people involved in the attack."

Yesterday's meeting was told that the whole syndicate has been tracked. As many as 300 people were arrested in this connection and 203 are now in custody. The arrestees from Sakhira, Kushtia, Tangail and Gazipur have given significant information.

**TIGHTENED SECURITY DURING RAMADAN**

Over 35 mobile courts will work during the month of Ramadan beginning in the first week of October. More check-posts will be added to existing 100 ones and block-raids will be intensified during the month.

The meeting ordered to observe a month-long 'traffic month' to be launched seven days before the Ramadan to ease traffic congestion in the city.

**MOBILE COURT**

The ministry asked the mobile courts working across the country to deal out strong punishment to those who will be found guilty second time of food adulteration. It instructed the courts to jail such people.

The mobile courts have so far jailed 33 people, filed 932 cases and collected a fine of Tk 56 lakh in connection with food adulteration until yesterday.

The meeting was also told that the reform to the Pure Food Ordinance is about to be finalised.

## Bangladesh

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supersub and big guns like Sanath Jayasuriya, Muttiah Muralitharan and Chaminda Vaas were all rested but the second-string Lankan attack still tore through the Tigers' batting to dismiss the visitors for 108. It was Bangladesh's second lowest total against Sri Lanka.

The reduced 48-overs-a-side match began after a one-hour delay and when the Lankan innings was just 1.4-overs old, another 50-minute rain interruption saw their target revised to 106 in 46 overs.

And Aviska Gunawardene, playing for the first time in the series, made the most of his opportunity to notch his 12th ODI half-century to wrap up victory inside 22 overs. The left-handed opener cracked half a dozen boundaries to score 52 off 61 balls to steady the innings after Tapash Baisya had removed Upul Tharanga and one-down Dilhara Lokuhettige cheaply.

Opener Upul Tharanga's impressive run came to an end as the southpaw, fresh from hitting 60 and 105, was clean bowled on nine while pinch-hitter Dilhara Lokuhettige slashed the ball to Syed Rasel at deep third man on two.

Thilan Samaraweera was run out and Aviska left a run shy of the target when he pulled a short ball by Khaled Mahmud straight to Tushar Imran at midwicket.

Earlier, after being put into bat by stand-in captain Mahela Jayawardene, the Bangladesh openers added 47 runs in eight overs. But first change Dilhara Fernando captured three wickets in his first spell and Farveez Maharoof, whose 4-over first spell went for 23 runs, returned to bag 3-2 in four overs as the innings rapidly fell apart.

The two rookie pacers had no venom in their bowling but the Tigers added just seven runs to lose Javed Omar (18), Shahriar Nafees (21), Mohammad Rafique (11), Mohammad Ashraful (0), Aftab Ahmed (1) and Habibur Bashar (1) in 27 balls.

The tail, however, dug in deep to avoid more humiliation by taking the total past the 100-mark.

Man-of-the-match Fernando finished with 3-19 and Maharoof with 3-25. Upul Tharanga was adjudged man-of-the-series.

Sri Lanka won the first two matches by 88 and 75 runs.

Bangladesh will start their preparation for the two Tests with a practice match at the Colts Cricket Club ground from September 7.

## Tough anti-terror

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considers the August 17 blasts as deep-rooted conspiracy against democracy, constitution, humanity and the very existence of the nation. That is why the government has deployed all of its might to trap and punish the conspirators and extremists.

The minister said there is no scope to view these incidents from any partisan outlook as they are related to the country's independence and sovereignty.

"We have to unite irrespective of party and ideology on the issue of suppressing extremists and terrorists. Everyone should cooperate the government," Moudud said, adding that the government seeks help and assistance from all quarters in this regard.

He said although there are strict laws against terrorism, actions can only be taken when the guilt is proved through proper investigation and prosecution.

"The investigation process is not strong enough. There is a lack of necessary trained human resources required to probe such offences," he admitted.

Moudud however said the government has taken massive programmes to build trained and skilled human resources through establishment of strong and capable investigation units.

Referring to Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), he said, "Steps have been taken to make the members of the law enforcement agencies efficient, strong and more capable." "I don't think the Rab has so far made any misuse of power," he categorically said.

Moudud said there is no dearth of sincerity on the part of the government to unearth the elements responsible for the August 17 serial blasts. The government would, if need be, invite international and foreign agencies for help in this connection, he added.

He pointed out that in many countries new laws are being made to cope with the changed situations. Besides, there are many international or transnational laws to cope with terrorism and subversive activities like those enacted in India, Pakistan, the US and the UK.

## Govt to open

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Sources said opening of the consulate offices in Sydney, Australia, was a commitment of the prime minister, while consulates in Milan, Italy and in Miami, USA were promised by the finance minister and state minister for home during their visits to those countries.

The meeting also discussed economic benefits, services to the expatriate Bangladeshis and business related aspects of opening of the consulates.

The proposal will soon be placed before the cabinet meeting for final approval.

## Aiyar arrives in Dhaka

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with top Bangladesh leaders.

Sources said Aiyar's visit to Dhaka is primarily to discuss the proposed \$1 billion tri-nation gas pipeline project which would tie Myanmar and India through Bangladesh.

Aiyar was due to arrive on August 27 but his arrival was delayed following extension of parliament session in India.

A high official from the ministry of foreign affairs told The Daily Star yesterday that Aiyar, an influential and senior minister of Indian government, is coming to Dhaka at the invitation of Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

"Aiyar is an important leader of ruling Congress Party and he holds vital portfolio," he added.

When asked whether the Indian minister will discuss energy issues including the proposed tri-nation gas pipeline, the official said, "It's a good-will visit, there is no specific agenda."

"He will have meetings with the prime minister, finance minister, foreign minister and adviser to the energy ministry to discuss bilateral issues," the official added.

According to the programme schedule, Aiyar will have a separate

meeting with the foreign minister and the energy adviser in the morning. He will meet the prime minister and the finance minister in the afternoon.

The Indian minister will also pay courtesy call on Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in the afternoon. He will leave Dhaka on Tuesday.

Sources said, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently had an exclusive meeting with Aiyar and External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh and discussed India's course for breaking the apparent impasse over the proposed tri-nation gas pipeline.

The meeting cleared Aiyar's visit to Dhaka for a trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh and Myanmar, which was delayed due to some bilateral issues.

Bangladesh agreed to allow the pipeline through its territory but set some preconditions. Dhaka insisted on some demands including the use of Indian territory for transporting goods to Nepal and Bhutan, allowing Dhaka to bring power from these countries and steps by New Delhi to reduce the \$2.5 billion trade imbalance.

## New Orleans left

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Guard who had been standing watch over the facility for nearly a week as some 20,000 hurricane survivors waited for rescue.

On Sunday, utilities planned to send trucks into the city to assess storm damage for the first time since Katrina struck. Morgan Stewart, a spokesman for electricity provider Entergy Corp., said the National Guard would escort the company's vehicles.

The convention centre was "almost empty" after 4,200 people were removed, according to Marty Bahamonde, a spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Earlier estimates of the crowd climbed as high as 25,000.

Thousands of refugees dragged their meager belongings to buses, the mood more numb than jubilant. Yolando Sanders, who had been stuck at the convention centre for five days, was among those who filed past corpses to reach the buses.

"Anyplace is better than here," she said.

"People are dying over there." Nearby, a woman lay dead in a wheelchair on the front steps. A man was covered in a black drape with a dry line of blood running to the gutter, where it had pooled. Another had lain on a chaise longue for four days, his stocking feet peeking out from under a quilt.

By mid-afternoon, only pockets of stragglers remained in the streets around the convention centre, and New Orleans paramedics began carting away the dead.

The exact number of dead won't be known for some time. Survivors were still being plucked from roofs and shattered highways across the city. President Bush ordered more than 7,000 active duty forces to the Gulf Coast on Saturday.

"There are people in apartments and hotels that you didn't know were there," Army Brig. Gen. Mark Graham said.

The overwhelming majority of those stranded in the post-Katrina chaos were those without the resources to escape and, overwhelmingly, they were black.

The first few days were a natural disaster. The last four days were a

## 14-party vows

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Jail said, adding that the government got panicked after the verdict as their misdeeds came out through the judgment.

After the verdict, the BNP has no moral right to cling to power anymore as it was formed through an illegal process, Jail observed.

Blasting Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, the AL leader said, "If the verdict is worthless at all, then why the government rushed to the residence of a chamber judge in the midnight and managed a stay order on it."

AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu, who presided over the rally, urged people to unite under the banner of 14-party alliance to launch a mass movement and oust the BNP-Jammat-led coalition government.

"We will force the alliance to quit and install a democratic government through a free and fair election," he said, adding that the AL from the very beginning was vocal against all military regimes.

AL leader Abdur Razzakz vowed to resist any election without realisation of opposition's demand of reforms in the caretaker government and Election Commission.

"We will implement the observation of the verdict after forming government of people," JSD leader Hasanul Haq Inusaid.

Emphasising greater unity of all pro-liberation democratic parties, he said, "The terrorists and militants will be ousted and brought to justice."

Workers' party leader Bimal Biswas said the verdict "appreciated by the nation" has brought new dimension to the history of the country's politics, democracy and rule of law. Awami League leaders Motia Chowdhury, Mohammad Hanif, and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Samyabadi Dal leader Dilip Banua, Gono Forum leader advocate Subrata Chowdhury, Ganotantri Party leader Azizul Islam Khan, NAP leader MA Gani and Gono Azadi League leader Abdus Samad also addressed the rally.

Later the opposition leaders led a big procession that ended at the Central Shaheed Minar after parading different city streets.

## Militants threaten

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Hindu community if they continue to report on Jamaat and other Islamist parties. They said the journalists of Hindu faith do not have any right to write on the Islamist outfits.

**EXCERPT FROM THE LETTER**

"Our aim is to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh through an armed revolution. We will continue to attack to achieve the goal. No Hindu religious fair will be allowed in Pak-Bangla and no Hindu will be allowed to vote in the next parliamentary election.

Our manpower will not decrease, no matter how hard you try writing against us and informing police of our activities. It's because we are in Jihad. We had declared in leaflets four to five months ago that DC (Deputy Commissioner), SP (Superintendent of Police), and other police officials will not act against Bangla Bhai, Ahle Hadith and Jamaat.

Some of our activists may be nabbed, but that will not make us stop. And that's why we ask you not to write anymore against us.

We --Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, Al Galib, and Delwar Hossain Saidee--have decided in a meeting that we will execute those who will write against Jamaat-e-Islami, Harkatul Jehad, Ahle Hadith, Jamiat-e-Ulamia Islam and Muslim Mujahid Party.

Anyway, do not inform police of it [the letter].

How many of our activists will you have nabbed by police? Be warned, we are spread all over the country.

There will be no December 16 [the Victory Day], February 21 [Amar Ekushey], August 15, Tagore songs, and national anthem in the country. Hindus will have to be converted to Islam before general elections; otherwise they will have to leave Pak Bangla.

**OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

Riazul Islam, a top local leader of Juma'atul Mudar-resin Bangladesh, was taken on a five-day remand yesterday. He was arrested on Friday night for suspected links to the August 17 blasts.

Lately, police and intelligence agencies have made a list of some 42 people suspected to have been involved in the countrywide bomb blitz. The law enforcers have launched drives to round them up.

UNB from Bagerhat reports: Barakatullah, a teacher of Al Markajul Islami As Salafi Madrasa and Orphanage in the district, yesterday confessed to having participated in staging the blasts in the district.

M Mustafa Kamal, superintendent of Bagerhat police, said Barakatullah, a leader of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), under interrogation said he was involved in detonating bombs in Rail Road area of the town on August

## BFUJ, DUJ

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They also said all previous records of killing and assaulting journalists and professional risks have been broken during the rule of the four-party alliance government. Bangladesh is the most dangerous country in Asia for journalists, they added.

The BFUJ and DUJ leaders asked Saifur to refrain from making such irresponsible remarks; otherwise journalists will make tougher stance against him and other ministers who slander the press.

They said instead of maligning the press, the government should establish good governance by curbing corruption and crimes, maintaining law and order, practising democracy and ensuring freedom of the press.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, president and secretary general of the BFUJ, and Altaf Mahmud and Shah Alamgir, president and general secretary of the DUJ, addressed the meet.

17. He was arrested at Al Markajul Islami As Salafi Madrasa and Orphanage on August 24. Jobaer Hossain Dhali, an alleged leader of Harkatul Jehad and superintendent of the same madrasa, however, denied his involvement in the incident. Mongla police arrested him on Friday morning, following the confessional statement given by Morshed.

Police said Morshed and Jobaer will soon be sent to Dhaka to face grilling at Joint Interrogation Cell.

BDNEWS from Gaibandha reports: Police have launched a massive manhunt for top JMB cadre Abdul Aziz of Fulchhori upazila.

On examining the information gathered, police are convinced that he was involved in the August 17 blasts in Gaibandha.

The JMB leaders and activists, meanwhile, continued distributing leaflets among the people of the district and they seem to be still active.

## Farmers, poor

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agricultural commodities (higher transport and marketing costs being included) that will badly affect the urban poor consumers and marginal and small farmers.

"The rise in diesel and kerosene prices will seriously hit the farmers, who require diesel to irrigate cropland and kerosene to lit candles and lanterns at their homes," Director General of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies Dr Quazi Shahabuddin said.

"It is understood that the government may need to increase the petroleum prices for fiscal balancing, for maintaining macro-stability but not at the cost of poverty alleviation. Government needs to work out protection mechanism for the poor. You just can not equally expose all segments of the society to the fiscal adjustments," said Shahabuddin.

The real pinch of the diesel price hike will be felt in coming Boro season when farmers will have to buy diesel in higher price to irrigate their paddy fields, sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension told The Daily Star.

Even before that, the farmers may have to incur extra costs on diesel purchase for supplementary irrigation to rain-fed Aman cultivation due to this year's less amount of rain at various pockets, they noted.

Out of the 786,004 shallow pumps now in operation for irrigation across the country, 731,612 are diesel-run and the remaining 54,392 electricity-run while farmers use roughly six to seven lakh tonne of diesel a year mainly to irrigate winter rice Boro and provide supplementary irrigation for Aman, official statistics say.

Now per acre irrigation cost difference between the two systems is as high as Tk 600, the ministry sources said, adding that farmers using diesel-run pumps have to incur 30 per cent more cost than those using electricity-run pumps as the latter get power supply in subsidised rate.

A MoA bailout proposal made in August, 2003 to provide Tk 310 crore subsidy for diesel used in irrigation got nod from the Cabinet Committee on Agriculture and was recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture for approval.

But the proposal has remained shelved so far due to finance ministry's negative attitude.

The proposed subsidy for diesel-run irrigation pumps is needed to match the subsidy that farmers are already enjoying in using electricity-run irrigation pumps, MoA officials said, adding that the subsidy would enable farmers to keep their production costs equally low.

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister for Food and Disaster Management Asadul Habib Dulu told this correspondent that due to an already rising trend in rice price, the government will launch a vigorous vulnerable group feeding and open market sale programme from later this month.