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FUEL PRICE HIKE Opposition to call hartal for Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) and its left-leaning allies are likely to call a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country on September 11, demanding withdrawal of the latest fuel price hike.

The decision to enforce a hartal, also to protest price spiral of essentials, was taken at a joint meeting of leaders of the AL, 11-party alliance, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) and National Awami Party.

An announcement on the proposed shutdown will be made today, a senior opposition leader said after the meeting held at the Gono Forum office.

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Living turns costlier on fuel price hike

Commoners suffer as prices of essentials, transport fare go up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's latest fuel price hike in a bid to stabilise national economy has pushed up the living cost, threatening living standard of common people both in urban and rural areas.

Common people depending on fixed income are facing tremendous pressure to manage the regular expenses, including those of transport and purchasing essentials.

"The common people are to shoulder all the burdens of the fuel price hike as their incomes have not increased," said Golam Kibria, coordinator of an NGO.

A visit to the city's Karwan Bazar yesterday revealed that immediately after Saturday's declaration of the increased price of fuels, the prices of each and every items shot up by Tk 4-12 from the prices of the previous week.

Onion was being sold at Tk 24,

up by Tk 4, ginger at Tk 72, up by Tk 12, sugar at Tk 37, up by Tk 3, pulses at Tk 50, up by Tk 2, and beef at Tk 120, up by Tk 10.

Buying different food items now costs a middle class person almost 80 percent more than even a year ago as the price of every item has increased by 20-40 percent, said a city dweller yesterday.

"It is hard to imagine how a poor labourer with an earning of Tk

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TRI-NATION PIPELINE

Aiyar says Dhaka, Delhi clear way for signing MoU

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New
Delhi

Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar yesterday said New Delhi and Dhaka seemed to have resolved outstanding issues relating to a tri-nation pipeline for transporting natural gas from Myanmar.

"It looks as if we have resolved outstanding issues, clearing way for signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU)," Aiyar, who returned from Dhaka early yesterday, told reporters here.

He said the initial agreement came at a meeting with Bangladesh's Energy Adviser Mahmudur Rahman the day before yesterday.

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ACC screens out 50pc Bac staff

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

After 10 months of its formation, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday completed screening of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) staff.

The anti-graft watchdog will keep about 50 percent of the Bac employees and ask the government to take back the rest, sources said.

The Bac had 1,008 employees when it was dissolved in November last year.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan and Commissioners Prof Maniruzzaman Miah and

Maniruddin Ahmed finalised the screening at a meeting yesterday.

The meeting saw some sharp disagreement and the situation at one point became so intense that Maniruddin Ahmed walked out of it and did not return.

Earlier on June 29, the ACC in the opening phase of the screening inducted into it 20 anti-corruption officers (ACO) and 30 inspectors from the pool of Bac officers through a gazette notification on the screening criteria.

Yesterday's meeting decided to have 14 more ACOs, 20 more inspectors, 77 assistant inspectors

(third class employees) from the Bac staff.

Besides, it chose to retain half of the remaining 681 third and fourth class employees of the Bac.

The screening may have 100 of ACO and inspectors of Bac dropped from the list of employees to be absorbed in the ACC.

Officers of ACO and inspectors ranks enjoy the status of first class and second class employees.

"The ACC will now make a list of the employees who would go back to

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18 more camel jockeys return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighteen more Bangladeshi children, who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), returned home yesterday, bringing the total number of such returnees to 83.

Twenty guardians and their other children, not used as jockeys, also accompanied the group that arrived at Zia International Airport (ZIA) by a Bangladesh Biman flight at about 12:30pm.

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) Executive Director Salma Ali, Juvenile Justice Officer of United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) Rafiquzzaman, and a senior assistant secretary of home ministry received them at the ZIA.

They were sheltered at a city home of BNWLA that will begin the reintegration process tomorrow, said an official.

Earlier 65 other children returned home in three batches on August 11, 23, and 25.

Bangladesh government took

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PHOTO: STAR

Another batch of 18 Bangladeshi children, used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates, arrives at Zia International Airport yesterday.

PDB picks flawed bidder for 150 MW Chandpur plant

SHARIEF KHAN

The Power Development Board (PDB) has finally recommended the flawed bid of disqualified Chinese company Harbin to set up the proposed 150 megawatt combined cycle Chandpur Power Plant, sources said.

The power ministry is expected to seek the Cabinet Purchase Committee's approval of the \$41 million bid, which appears to be drastically cheaper but has a built-in legal loophole that would allow the bidder to manipulate project costs in future.

Harbin's offer grossly violated the PDB's tender rules. In the June 28 bid, Harbin submitted only a financial offer although the PDB sought both technical and financial offers together.

Harbin's invalid bid was however promoted by a section of PDB officials saying that it had beaten its nearest competitor, another Chinese company -- CMEC -- by \$11 million and Indian competitor Bhel by \$24 million.

As the PDB accepted Harbin's bid as 'responsive', the CMEC lodged a formal protest pointing out that this was a violation of the government's Public Procurement Regulation, 2003 and that the PDB clearly favoured Harbin. The CMEC also said if the government went ahead with the project, it would go to court.

"It is very unusual for a Chinese company to lodge a protest against another Chinese company since both of them are owned by the Chinese government," a PDB source remarked.

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Rab empowered to try its members in court martial style

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has notified a gazette on Rapid Action Battalion Rules empowering the elite force to try its unruly members in a fashion almost identical to a court martial.

Rab personnel from different disciplinary forces will have to face life imprisonment and punishment on different terms if found guilty by two kinds of courts--the Special Court and the Summary Court--as prescribed in the new rules, which came into effect August 16.

Those who are not from the disciplinary forces will be tried under

departmental proceedings, which prescribe termination of jobs, removal, forced retirement, demotion, withholding of promotion, cuts in salary and allowances and withholding of increment.

Authorities claimed the trial process is designed following the Armed Police Battalion Ordinance, 1979 court system and departmental proceedings. But it apparently resembles a military trial system, as it provides no scope to go to other courts of the country for appeal.

If a Rab officer is convicted, he will be able to appeal to higher

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Transport strike withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transport owners and workers yesterday withdrew the countrywide transport strike they earlier announced for today and tomorrow upon the communications minister's assurance of enhancing transport fares within September 15.

At a meeting at the communications ministry, the Minister Nazmul Huda assured the transport owners' and workers' leaders that the government will declare the re-fixation of the transport fare soon, said GM Siraj, chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association.

The government will also inform

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