

## Govt faces music

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fuel. The hoarding along with a panic buying resulted in a scarcity and increase in fuel prices in the north.

But, following the lawmakers' censure, after the Maghrib break, State Minister for Finance and Planning Abul Hossain in a statement told the House the government has no plan at the moment to increase the fuel prices.

**THE CENSURE**  
BNP lawmaker Abdul Mottalib Akand first raised the issue of fuel crisis during the question-answer period, saying farmers in his constituency, who have been suffering an acute fuel crisis, besieged him recently.

"I want to know from the finance minister what are his measures to keep the fuel prices within the farmers' reach," he said amid support from his party colleagues.

BNP MP Mehedi Hasan Rumi next said the government's efforts like providing farm loans would not bring any positive results if they were forced to buy fuel at a high price.

Another BNP lawmaker, Rustam Ali Farazi, asked the government to take action against the hoarders who gave rise to the fuel prices.

The ruling party MPs also pointed a finger at Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and

urged him not to make any more irresponsible statements that could have disastrous consequences.

Farmers in the northern districts have been facing a severe fuel crisis at the very start of Boro cultivation, JP lawmaker Hafizuddin Ahmed told the House after the Maghrib break on a point of order.

Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Riasat Ali Bishwas in a call attention notice then sought the prime minister's attention to the issues of price spiral of essentials and the fuel crisis. He said if the problems were not addressed properly, it would have negative implications for the ruling alliance in the next general elections.

**STATEMENT OF FINANCE**  
As Finance Minister Saifur Rahman was not present in the House, State Minister Abul Hossain answered the queries.

But, he found himself the target of a volley of protests mostly from lawmakers of his own party, when he said the government has little to do to keep the fuel prices low, as those are much higher at present on the international market.

In face of the protestation, he just said, "The government is trying to stabilise the prices."

**OTHER BUSINESS**  
Yesterday Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas introduced the Building Construction (Amendment) Bill, 2006 in the House, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed the Judicial Administration Training Institution (Amendment) Bill, 2006 and Agriculture Minister MK Anwar the Fertiliser (Management) Bill, 2006. All the bills were sent to the respective standing committees for scrutiny.

A thanksgiving discussion on the presidential speech also started yesterday.

**Govt playing**

**FROM PAGE 16**  
The AL chief said the BNP-led alliance government captured state power using the terrorists and they are patronising the terrorists and militants to carry out their design.

Referring to the prime minister's (PM) claim about the country's development, Hasina said she (PM) is "only cutting red ribbons of projects taken up by the previous AL government".

Accusing the PM and her family for all the grenade and bomb attacks in the country, she said, "This is the reason the government is not interested in investigating any of these cases."

The opposition leader also accused the PM for what she said 'plundering national wealth'. "People will take account of all their wealth, which the prime minister and her family made illegally," she said, adding, "If I get the chance to run the country in future, I will return all the money to the people."

Referring to Shamsuddin's joining the AL, she said, "His joining AL is a protest of the killings, repression and terrorism of the alliance regime."

Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP, Obaidul Kader, Sabir Hossain Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Dewan Shafiqul Arefin Tutul, Shamsuddin Ahmed MP, Asim Kumar, Golam Mohiuddin, Kamrul Huda Selim, Jalal Uddin, Awlad Hossain Harun and Dewan Abdur Rob also spoke on the occasion.

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## 2 'graft' cases

**FROM PAGE 16**  
challenge the High Court (HC) ruling vacating its earlier orders.

Two corruption cases were filed with Tejgaon Police Station on August 7, 2002 and December 11, 2001. SA Samad, the then principal secretary to the PM, is among the other accused in the cases.

In the statements of the cases, the former PM and others were accused of causing a loss of Tk 447 crore in purchasing frigates and about Tk 143 crore in appointing lobbyists for readymade garment industry.

The charge sheets were framed in the two cases.

The HC stayed the proceedings of the case regarding frigate purchase on December 6, 2003, and that on appointment of lobbyists on December 18, 2002.

But a HC bench on August 16 and 21, 2005, vacated the stay orders.

## Schoolgirl dies

**FROM PAGE 1**  
around 10:30am.

"I saw Aklima standing near the road. Suddenly she ran across the road and the police van hit her, killing her on the spot," Enamul Haq said.

Locals captured the police vehicle immediately after the accident. Forces from Adabar Police Station rushed to the spot and saved the van from public wrath.

The duty officer at Adabar Police Station said the driver, constable Mizanur Rahman, is in their custody.

"We will decide whether Mizan will be arrested or not after filing of a case, which is under process, in this connection," the duty officer added.

On Saturday, nine-year-old Radib Raihan alias Diganta, a class II student of Motijheel Ideal School and College, was killed as a passenger bus hit a motorcycle, in which he was going to school with his father.

## Govt to seek

**FROM PAGE 1**  
time for them to appeal for an extension of the deadline, he said, "That cannot say."

On whether praying for time to separate the judiciary from the administration has become a routine job for the government, Moudud said the previous Awami League government was not successful in separating the judiciary though the court had granted them one and a half years for the task.

"The issue should be handled with care," Moudud told the journalists, adding that the government does not lack sincerity in this regard, as it is an electoral commitment of the four-party alliance.

Once the judiciary is separated, it would need a separate secretariat, more spaces for the judicial magistrates in the bar associations. Especially during the transition period, things should be dealt with extreme caution, he added.

Moudud said the Judicial Service Commission has recommended names for the 140 posts of assistant judges, and 25 of them have already been appointed.

Asked if the government will form a supreme judicial council against one of the election commissioners for 'breaching the secrecy rules' of the Election Commission, he said no such decision was made.

## NCBs asked

**FROM PAGE 1**  
finance ministry and they (NCBs) will not refuse to open LC for fuel import by Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) in future, the minister added.

Mahmudur Rahman, adviser to the energy ministry, said the finance minister has directed the BB governor so there be no problem in LC opening.

A meeting source said the central bank will provide loans in the form of overdraft to the NCBs, who are facing dollar crisis, so that they do not face any problem in LC opening for petroleum import by the BPC.

The BB and NCBs will later decide the rate of interest on the loans.

BPC owes around Tk 9,000 crore to Sonali, Janata and Agrani banks. Sonali bank alone has Tk 5,500 crore in dues with the BPC and it has stopped LC opening for the corporation.

In early January, Janata and Agrani banks told the energy adviser that they would not be able to open LC of more than \$500 million due to dollar crisis.

The meeting source said the finance minister has given the directive as a temporary solution to the problem.

The energy ministry informed the meeting that a process is on to take loan worth \$500 million from the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) and Standard Chartered Bank for import of petroleum.

Besides, one billion dollar has also been sought from the Islamic Development Bank, which gives \$700 million in loan annually.

Both Saifur and Mahmudur told the reporters that there is no plan to hike the oil prices in near future.

The BB governor, finance secretary, managing directors of the NCBs and high officials of finance and energy ministries were present in the meeting.

## Boro farming

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Farmers require 12 lakh tonne diesel during the peak Boro season in January to run over one million pumps to irrigate the Boro crop, which constitutes 55 percent of the country's total yield of rice. The Aus and Aman crops constitute the rest. This year's projected target of Boro production is set at 140 million tonne.

Farmers could not plant Boro in early January due to dense fog. There was also a shortage of labourers during Eid-ul-Azha in mid-January.

Officials speaking on condition of anonymity at the agriculture ministry, acknowledged the farmers' plight due to the rise in diesel price by Tk 4-8 per litre but once again passed the responsibility on the finance ministry for shelving its proposal of subsidising diesel for irrigation two years now.

Since the BNP-led coalition came to power in 2001, diesel prices have risen from Tk 15 to Tk 33 per litre, increasing farm output costs and in effect forcing the consumers to pay much higher price for rice now than four years back.

Aggrieved people blocked the road leading to the Chilmari river port in Kurigram district yesterday, demanding diesel and petrol. Police were deployed at the filling stations in Panchagarh to thwart agitators while people laid siege to a filling station at Taraganj in Rangpur.

Local DAE officials said at least 5,000 out of 30,000 diesel-run pumps in Kurigram remained inactive due to the fuel crisis. The DAE projected Boro cultivation on 71,805 hectares of land in this northern district but half the area still is not ready for Boro transplantation.

Magistrate Enamul Haq had to intervene and ease the agitating people of rationing diesel.

A laudinal Mondal of Atrai in Naogaon district said he had been

trying to collect some diesel for the past few days but in vain. "Ultimately, I will have to stop operating my irrigation pumps and opt for non-Boro crops that can be done without irrigation," he said.

Experts fear such options by Boro farmers would mean less rice production in the country in 2005-06, which will strain the country's foreign reserve for importing more rice.

Another farmer from Bogra said he could manage only five litre diesel yesterday and that too from several pumps, while he required 20 litre.

Our staff reporter Anwar Ali reports from Rajshahi that paddy growers from different upazilas in the district came to the divisional headquarters for diesel but had to return empty handed in most cases.

The situation remained unchanged yesterday with all the 30 fuel stations in the district remaining closed as the pump owners could not buy oil from the Baghabari depot.

Quazi Anwar, a paddy grower from Mohisbalbari in Godagari, said an unknown person promised him to sell diesel at Tk 15 higher than the regular price. Anwar said he headed seedbeds for cultivating Boro on 12 bighas of land but could not irrigate the land for want of diesel.

Our Netrakona correspondent Jahangir Alam reported that retailers sold diesel and kerosene at Tk 50 and petrol at Tk 100 per litre.

The artificial fuel crisis gripped the district town and ten upazilas of the district as all the filling stations refrained from selling fuel yesterday.

Our Pabna correspondent Shokat Afroz Asad reports: A temporary pontoon was set up at Nagarbari-Kazirhat Ghat in Sujanagar upazila of Pabna yesterday to help ease the crisis of fuel in the northern districts.

## Cops asked to execute arrest warrant against Inquilab publisher

**COURT CORRESPONDENT**

A Dhaka court yesterday directed the officer-in-charge (OC) of Sutrapur Police Station to execute an earlier issued arrest warrant against former publisher of Inquilab ASM Bakibillah.

The Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka also directed the OC to execute the order of confiscating Bakibillah's removable property.

Following the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mujibul Haque issued the order.

According to the complaint, the daily Inquilab ran a write-up of Obed Jagirar on December 15, 2001 in favour of declaring August 14 as the independence day of Bangladesh.

After publication of the write-up, Advocate Iqbal Hossain filed a case against the writer, editor of the newspaper AMM Bahauddin and publisher Bakibillah on January 1, 2002.

Among them, the writer and the editor had earlier obtained bail from the lower court, while Bakibillah has been absconding.

The court had issued an arrest warrant against him and ordered to confiscate his property.

## Law on financial reporting by corporate bodies on the cards

**BDNEWS, Dhaka**

Consultants have been selected to formulate the Financial Reporting Act and the Financial Reporting Council, an independent regulatory body, to regulate accounting practices in the corporate sector, World Bank officials said yesterday.

"The regulatory capacity relating to financial reporting by regulated entities will be strengthened for three agencies -- Bangladesh Bank (BB), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Insurance Department," said a WB statement.

Strengthening of the auditing and accounting practices in Bangladesh is one of the major components of the Economic Management and Technical Assistance Project (EMTAP) launched by WB in 2004.

This component titled "Strengthening Auditing and Accounting Practices" also aims to strengthen the capacity of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) and the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh (ICMAB), and also improve the curricula and quality of teaching of accounting and audit by universities, colleges, ICAB and ICMAB.

The other important components of the EMTAP project include modernising tax administration, improving and implementing a sound information and communication technology (ICT) system in the government and strengthening communication between government and external stakeholders.

## 3 Kansat leaders

**FROM PAGE 16**  
fresh confrontation between police and agitators.

Rajshahi district and city units of Workers' Party of Bangladesh submitted a memorandum to Deputy Commissioner Sayed Ahsanul Haque demanding compensation for the victims of police firing.

Party leaders Liaquat Ali Liku, Rafiqul Islam Piarul and Jubo Moitree leader Ashraful Haque, among others, were present.

Meanwhile, Belal-e-Baki, grandson of prominent educationist late Idris Ahmad Mia of Shibganj visited the injured at Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital. He donated Tk 1,000 each to all the 15 injured.

## Federer wins

**FROM PAGE 16**  
to win three successive Grand Slams since Pete Sampras won at the 1994 Australian Open. The Swiss went into this year's Open having won last year's Wimbledon and US Open.

He now joins other tennis greats John McEnroe, John Newcombe and Mats Wilander with seven major titles and is closing in on all-time leader Sampras with 14.

It was the 24-year-old's 35th title and his fourth win over 20-year-old Baghdatis, who beat three top-10 players to reach his first Grand Slam final and only second tour final overall.

Federer pocketed 900,000 US dollars for his Australian victory, swelling his career prizemoney to 21,274,573 US dollars.

Baghdatis was bidding to become the first unseeded player to win the Australian Open since 212-ranked Australian Mark Edmondson won here in 1976 and his ranking has now climbed to 26.

## 66 killed in Poland

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Saturday afternoon in the hall near Katowice, which was hosting a pigeon fanciers' exhibition.

Katowice fire chief Kazimierz Krzowski said rescue efforts "in a way have come to an end, and we are bringing out corpses."

A priest outside the building's entrance prayed over the bodies of an adult and a child covered by a blanket and a tarp. In the hours following the collapse, witnesses said people beneath the wreckage were calling family or emergency services on their cell phones for help.

Franciszek Kowal escaped onto a terrace when he saw the roof starting to fall, then jumped about 15 feet to safety.

"People tried to break windows in order to get out," Kowal told The Associated Press. "People were hitting the panes with chairs, but the windows were unbreakable. One of the panes finally broke, and they started to get out by the window."

Krzysztof Mejer, a spokesman for the government of the Silesia region, said at least 33 people had died and 141 were injured.

Fire brigade chaplain Capt. Henryk Kuczbowski, a Roman Catholic priest, said he gave last rites to one of the injured, a 50-year-old man who later died.

A second man was taken to the hospital," Kuczbowski said. "His 13-year-old daughter is dead, but he doesn't know that yet. He's in shock."

Crumpled birdcages were scattered inside the building near the entrance, and dozens of white and brown pigeons perched on the twisted rafters, their feathers fluffed against the cold.

The weight of snow likely caused the roof to cave in at about 5:30 p.m., less than two hours before the event was scheduled to close for the evening, Katowice fire brigade spokesman Jaroslaw Wojtasik said.

Hundreds of firefighters responded along with search-and-rescue teams with dogs and local miner rescue teams, Wojtasik said. Some 30 people gathered in a building next to the site awaiting news of their loved ones.

**EVEN PASSERS-BYPITCHED IN.**  
Zbigniew Chmurny said he was on his way back from the movies with his wife when they came upon the collapse. He said he raced home for his Labrador retriever, then headed back to the site.

"My dog found two unconscious people," he said. "I just hope they'll survive."

Temperatures dropped to 1 degree overnight.

Rescue workers pumped warm air into the ruin for those feared trapped inside, as crews dug into the wreckage with saws and other equipment, using flashlights and floodlights. The firefighters also used jacks to stabilize some of the building's beams as they attempted to get to those trapped.

Wojtasik estimated the effort could take another 40 hours.

An unidentified woman with bandages around her head, a bloodied chin and scrapes on her face told TVN24 from her hospital bed that she feared one of her friends was dead.

"I heard a snap like breaking matches as the roof fell on everybody. Then I heard an unbelievable scream, and then I tried to escape like everybody else," she said. "Something fell on me, I turned around, somebody stepped on me, but on my knees I was able to get out. I still don't know where some of my friends are and I haven't had any contact with them most likely one of them is dead."

The "Pigeon 2006" fair was made up of more than 120 exhibitors, including groups from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Ukraine and Poland, according to the fair's Web site. Mejer said foreigners were among the injured, including a German, a Belgian and a Czech citizen.

## 200 shanties

**FROM PAGE 16**  
slum. They said the rejected clothes, available in almost every shanty room, caught fire and aggravated the spread.

Firefighters of Mondolpara and Hajiganj rushed to the spot and managed to control the fire within 40 minutes. The slum-dwellers claim the loss of valuables is worth at least Tk 20 lakh.

## 60 officials

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The establishment ministry yesterday also issued a notification that 229 of the 378 senior assistant secretaries promoted to the rank of deputy secretary will continue working at their present station until further notice.

## Hamas mulls using

**FROM PAGE 16**  
Speaking from his base in Damascus, Syria, Mashaal insisted his group would not disarm and said Hamas' military wing, estimated at nearly 5,000 gunmen in Gaza alone, could be merged into a Palestinian army.

"We are ready to unify the weapons of Palestinian factions, with Palestinian consensus, and form an army like any independent state," he said.

Israeli officials demanded that Hamas look for peaceful solutions to the conflict.

"If Hamas wants to be considered a partner in peace, it's very clear what it has to do. It has to renounce terrorism, disarm, accept Israel's right to exist and support political solutions to issues rather than pursuing violent jihad," Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Reggev said.

Mashaal also said Hamas would abide by existing agreements with the country "as long as it is in the interest of our people."

Israel and the Palestinians have a host of agreements dealing with everything from administration to peace frameworks. Mashaal did not say which agreements he was referring to.

Israeli officials have said repeatedly that they would not deal with Hamas, and Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said Israel would not rule out targeted killings against Hamas leaders if they attack Israel.

Israeli airstrikes in 2004 killed Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his successor Abdel Aziz Rantisi.

"Whoever stands at the head of a terror organisation and continues to carry out terror attacks against Israel is not immune," Mofaz told Israel's Channel 2 television.

Mahmoud Zahar, an incoming Hamas parliamentarian and one of the group's top leaders in Gaza, told "CBS Evening News" that Hamas would be satisfied only if Israel withdrew from the land it has occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.

"Why not withdraw from West Bank and Jerusalem and to release our detainees and after that after that everybody will look at how to continue the process," he said.

Hamas' victory shocked Fatah, which dominated Palestinian politics for four decades. Abbas ordered an investigation into why his party lost so badly.

Marwan Barghouti, the jailed Palestinian uprising leader who was Fatah's top candidate and led efforts to reform the party, appealed for Fatah to hold a general conference to elect fresh leadership, according to a statement released by his wife, Fadwa.

He also congratulated Hamas and said Fatah would peacefully transfer power.

"We will respect the democratic process and its results and help those who won the confidence of our people," he said.

But many in the 58,000-member security force were less conciliatory and rejected any Hamas control.

"The security institution is a red line. We will not allow anyone to tamper with it," Gaza police chief Ala Hosni said. "It will remain a powerful and impartial arm that carries out

the decisions of the presidency (Abbas) and that stops any infighting or civil war."

Dozens of armed police officers briefly stormed the parliament building in Gaza City, demanding the security forces remain in Fatah's hands and calling for Hamas members who killed police in fighting in recent months to be brought to justice.

In Ramallah, hundreds of Fatah activists, including gunmen and security officers, marched into Abbas' compound and prayed at the grave of Yasser Arafat.

"We came to you Abu Amar to forgive us for what happened," they chanted, referring to Arafat by his nickname.

Abbas' security force prevented the activists from approaching his office. Militants outside the walled compound shot in the air.

"We'll show them hell as an opposition, and we will turn the Palestinian Authority security forces into armed militia led by Al Aqsa," Ramzi Obeidi, a leader of the Fatah-allied Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, told the crowd.

Other Fatah activists staged angry protests throughout the West Bank, including in Nabulus.

"We are now no longer part of the cease-fire," an Al Aqsa gunman, Nasser Haras, told the crowd, referring to a four-day truce with Israel.

In Tulkerem, gunman Ibrahim Khreisheh warned against cooperating with Hamas. "Whoever will participate in a government with Hamas, we will shoot him in the head," he said.

Abbas has said he would ask Hamas to form the next government and Hamas officials said they wanted to meet him Sunday. Hamas, with no experience in government, reached out to Fatah to form a coalition, but Fatah officials said they preferred to be in opposition.

Outlining his group's plan for the future, Mashaal said it would work to reform the corruption-riddled Palestinian Authority and continue its resistance to Israel.

In a move likely to anger Israel, Mashaal said Hamas would release Ahmed Saadat, leader of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He is being held at a Palestinian jail under Western supervision for ordering the assassination of an Israeli Cabinet minister in 2001.

President Bush told "CBS Evening News" on Friday that the United States would cut aid to the Palestinian government unless Hamas, which the US lists as a terror group, abolishes its militant wing and stops calling for Israel's destruction.

Speaking at the World Forum in Davos, Switzerland, former President Clinton suggested Saturday that the West should be more open to eventual talks with Hamas.

"You've got to find a way to at least open doors ... and I don't see how we can do it without more contact," he said. Hamas might "acquire a greater sense of responsibility, and as they do, we have to be willing to act on that."

## Biswa Ijtema ends

**FROM PAGE 1**  
League chief Sheikh Hasina, senior ministers, state ministers, political leaders, diplomats of some Muslim countries, and high government officials took part in the munajat from separate stages specially erected for them.

As the area from Board Bazar in Gazipur to Azampur in Uttara turned into a human sea, the munajat was relayed to far-flung areas through loudspeakers.

Roads, sidewalks, open spaces, and rooftops of nearby houses and factory buildings were teeming with people. Some even perched on the branches of trees to participate in the munajat.

Most of the devotees who joined the Akheri Munajat had to walk several kilometres as the highway towards Tongi was virtually closed down to traffic movement from the airport on the south and Joydevpur crossing on the north since the morning.

Attendance in the government and private offices, mills and factories in Dhaka, Tongi and Gazipur was thin, as a large number of employees and officials left their workplaces to join the munajat.

President Iajuddin Ahmed offered munajat from the main stage, while the prime minister accompanied by the president's wife Prof Anwara Begum, ministers, and party leaders attended the munajat from a dais at the Bata Complex.

Awami League chief Sheikh

## Two rapists

**FROM PAGE 16**  
colleague Ekramul Haq was returning home after a walk on Mohammadpur Embankment at about 6:00pm on January 13, 2002, when a gang of criminals led by Belal and Shah Alam