

Power crisis

FROM PAGE 1

BNP lawmaker from Bogra GM Seraj said, "Your (state minister) image is not very good in my locality, and people are angry with you." He demanded new power lines in his constituency.

Nadim Mostafa, another BNP legislator, said the power ministry has failed to install power lines in his constituency even three years after submission of application for those.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmakers alleged that the ruling alliance men have made crores of taka from power sector through corruption.

"Tk 16,000 crore has been spent in power sector in the last four and a half years but not a single megawatt of power has been added to the national grid," AL lawmaker Mirza Azam said. He also alleged that the power ministry has given work order for buying power supply poles for rural electrification to 'Hawa Bhaban' men through corruption. "The ministry bought the poles for Tk 20,000 each while the actual price was only Tk

3,000 each."

In reply, the state minister said, "Owner of the daily Ajker Kagaj controls the business of electric poles supply and everybody knows which political party he belongs to."

Iqbal placed a list of 13 power projects taken up by the government, which he described as a long-term plan to meet the demand for power.

The projects are however at the initial stage of tender processing. The list shows that funds for five projects have not yet been ensured.

The state minister told the House, "The authorities will have to re-tender two projects and three others' tender bids are in the evaluation process."

Of the three other projects, the government is going to float tender for one, one is at proposal level and development proposal will have to be prepared for the other one.

Earlier, the state minister informed the House that the average daily supply of power is 3,200 to 3,400 MW against the highest demand of 4,300 MW.

Sit for talks

FROM PAGE 20

reluctant to move forward to that direction.

Khaleda, also the chairperson of the ruling BNP, urged people to vote for the BNP-led four-party alliance candidates in the next general elections to maintain the trend of democracy and development.

Listing various development works carried out by the coalition government in the last four and a half years, she said continuity of government is an imperative for maintaining the development process. Otherwise, the development activities will be stalled.

She said when people are united with the politics of production and development, a party is conspiring to halt development.

"Today our opposition is unleashing chaos, anarchy and disorder in the name of movement and killing people and damaging public property, the prime minister told the rally.

People can take correct decision and know how to advance the country, and so the people of Dhaka city voted for the BNP and alliance candidates in all the eight constituencies in 2001 election, she observed.

Chaired by local MP Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu, the rally was addressed, among others, by BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Labor

and Employment Amanullah Aman and City BNP General Secretary Abdus Salam.

About traffic congestion in the city, she said the government has taken up plans to construct more flyovers and new roads to ease the traffic chaos.

She said the government has planned to connect Mohakhali flyover through old airport to Agargaon to get over the traffic jam.

On power, the prime minister said there are some problems of electricity in the country, as the consumption of power has increased manifold due to the setting up of many new industries, mills and factories, schools, colleges, offices, businesses and other installations.

And her government has taken steps to set up more new power plants to meet the growing demand and solve the problem, she told the meeting.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated Bangladesh College of Leather Technology Complex at Hazaribagh.

She also inaugurated a new unit of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College at Azimpur and exchanged pleasantries with the teachers and students.

The prime minister then laid foundation stones of a power substation near cross-dam in Hazaribagh area, community center and 31-bed hospital at Rasulpur of Kamrangchra and a new building of Madrasa Education Board at Bakshibazar.

1.11 cr voters

FROM PAGE 1

voters, Nabi said, "The rise seems slightly high compared to the population size. The figure will increase further when those who were not enrolled will be included in the voter list."

About the eligible voters still remaining out of the list, Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (Fema) President Munira Khan yesterday told The Daily Star, "Five to eight per cent people may not have been registered in the draft list for different reasons and everybody considers this reasonable."

Many including officials in the EC Secretariat fear that the number of voters might be increased due to duplication of names and inclusion of fake voters in the list.

But the EC is helpless to prevent inclusion of fake voters in the list as it has no mechanisms to detect them.

"Population aged above 18 usually remains between 45 and 48 per cent," said a senior BBS official describing his experience in the field. He said the percentage may have risen to a maximum of 50 per cent in recent years, which means 50 per cent people are eligible voters.

About the sharp rise in the number of voters in the draft list, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz and other senior officials at the EC Secretariat remained tightlipped yesterday.

Contacted through his personal secretary (PS) for his comment, Aziz said he would not talk to the press. "The secretary will say what is needed to be said," Assistant Public Relations Officer (PRO) Abdur Rashid, who was assigned by the PS to communicate with the CEC, told journalists quoting Aziz.

When Acting Secretary to the EC Secretariat Mohammad Zakoria was contacted through his personal assistant, he refused to talk. "Sir is very busy with his tasks and cannot talk now," PRO Asaduzzaman Arzu told journalists.

Both BBS and EC Secretariat officials said people tend to suppress information regarding their actual ages while being listed as voters.

"People do not hide any information, particularly about their ages, during census, but they provide false information to the enumerators for

being listed as voters," a senior EC Secretariat official said. "We do not have any mechanism to prove people's actual age," he said.

CEC MA Aziz admitted at a luncheon meeting organised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh on April 25 that the EC has no mechanism to find out the fake voters.

Zakoria also echoed him on May 2. The latest census conducted in 2001 by the BBS, a vital wing under the planning ministry, shows 8,02,72,380 people in the age group of 18 years and above.

The EC on Wednesday published the draft voter list, with a total of 9,13,14,592 voters.

The census report in 2001 pointed out that of the 13 crore adjusted population, 6,80,80,940 people were 18 and above. But the voter list prepared in 2000 had witnessed 7.48 crore voters that triggered a controversy of having a significant number of ghost voters in it.

The European Union (EU) in a letter to the then CEC MA Syed noted that the voter list included a staggering 1.3 crore ghost voters.

Expressing its concerns, the EU in September 2003 said the number of 7.48 crore voters is too high in a population of 13 crore. It argued that 55 per cent of Bangladeshis are aged over 15 years. So, even if the age to be eligible as a voter is reduced to 15 years, the maximum number of voters cannot be more than 7.15 crore.

Rationalising his move for preparing a fresh voter list, CEC MA Aziz said on several occasions that the current electoral list is flawed and he cited the EU letter for substantiating his claim.

Aziz also quoted this year's US State Department report to point at the existence of 8 per cent fake voters on the 2000 list. He claimed the EC is preparing the fresh voter list with a view to ending the "epidemic of false voters".

The sharp rise in the number of voters on the draft of the fresh voter roll, however, does not conform to his claim.

Meanwhile, the officials of the EC Secretariat could not specify the number of voters according to sex. They said they need three or four more days for the task.

Gujarat mosques

FROM PAGE 20

"return to Pakistan."

Supreme Court judges Ruma Pal and Dalveer Bhandari on Thursday ordered a stay in a ruling by Gujarat High Court. The May 2 ruling allowed the municipality to tear down shrines such as an ancient mosque whose demolition sparked off the Vadodara riots.

A rights group, meanwhile urged Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, a leader in the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, to act to halt violence.

"The Gujarat government must be vigilant against extremist violence against helpless civilians," said Brad Adams, Asia director for the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"Instead of allowing this violence to deepen religious hatred, the authorities should launch an immediate, thorough and transparent investigation to ensure that those responsible are prosecuted and punished," he said.

Modi was also chief minister four years ago when top state officials including the current police chief P.C. Pandey, were blamed for sectarian riots that left more than 2,000 people dead.

Those riots erupted after 53 Hindus were killed in a train fire initially blamed on Muslims but later found to be an accident.

CPD protests

FROM PAGE 1

business in the name of religion..."

and so forth.

"Dr Debapriya, at no time uttered such words at the event," CPD said. The dialogue entitled "Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" was jointly organised by CPD, the daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel 1.

The Inqilab report also said Mahfuz Anam of The Daily Star and Matiur Rahman of the daily Prothom Alo attended the dialogue, which was not true, said the CPD release.

"Because of this tendentious and motivated reporting [of the daily Inqilab], the daily Sangram has carried a follow-up story of unwarranted nature," it added.

In the dialogue, a cross section of people, including public representatives from ruling party and opposition, academics, professionals, business leaders, cultural and development activists and students openly spoke their minds.

The speakers talked on political and administrative accountability, secular functioning of the state, secular functioning of the state, minority rights, terrorism, free and fair electoral process, use of black money and muscle power in the elections and nomination of competent candidates.

Robber killed

FROM PAGE 20

Rafiqul Islam alias Alauddin alias Babul, second in command of the Nantu Bahini, died on the spot as his associates fired on the law enforcers and tried to snatch him from the Rab custody at Peyarpur under the Bakerganj Police Station.

Rab and police claimed Rafiq, accused in more than six cases of robbery, murder, looting, abduction and toll collection in areas under different police stations, was a top most wanted criminal.

Lt Col Ershad, director of Rab-8 unit in Barisal, said Rafiq had been absconding since his gang leader Nantu was killed in crossfire two months ago.

Upon information, a special team of Rab-1 arrested Rafiq from Badda in Dhaka last Tuesday. He was handed over to the Barisal Rab the next day.

Following his confession to the Rab interrogation team, Rafiq was taken to Peyarpur launch terminal area around 4:00am yesterday to recover arms and ammunition hidden by the gang.

A gunfight ensued as Rafiq's associates, who had been hiding there, fired on the law enforcers.

The Rab members seized a gun with eight cartridges and a revolver with five bullets from the spot.

The dead body of Rafiq was sent to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College morgue for post mortem.

Locals brought out a procession rejoicing at the news of the criminal's death.

Petrol pump

FROM PAGE 1

PPOA that decision has already been taken and it will be gazetted shortly.

According to the decision, the dealers will get Tk 0.70 commission for per litre diesel, Tk 1.10 for petrol and Tk 1.18 for octane.

The existing commission is Tk 0.60 for diesel, Tk 0.80 for petrol and Tk 0.86 for octane, officials said.

However, the commission for kerosene will remain at Tk 0.41.

The government in the meeting assured the PPOA that they would get additional transport cost they spent to receive fuels from far-flung areas during suspension of supply from Baghabari depot.

Both sides have agreed that there is no necessity of extra monitoring in the capital, but strong surveillance will continue in the bordering areas for checking smuggling of fuel oils, said an official who attended the meeting.

The energy advisor in the meeting gave a decision that none would be allowed to receive oils by using other's licence. Stern action will be taken in that case, he added.

PPOA President Nazmul Haque led his side in the meeting.

Feeder operators

FROM PAGE 20

importers will have to bear the burden as freight charges will increase.

As garment manufacturers are the major stakeholders in the export-import trade, the feeder operators had a meeting with the president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and informed him of their decision, the sources said.

"We are informed about the fresh surcharge to be imposed by the feeder operators. We are writing to the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) to take special measures for clearing the congestion," BGMEA President Tipu Munshi told The Daily Star yesterday.

"If such a surcharge is imposed, it would cause huge financial loss to our export-import business," Munshi commented. "We will tell the CPA that we should not bear loss due to the unusual delay in container handling at the port," he added.

Normally a feeder operator charges \$300 for carrying each TEU container from Singapore to Chittagong Port. It takes four days to arrive at Chittagong but the vessels have to wait for at least seven days to get unloaded and released from the port.

Earlier, the feeder operators of Chittagong Port imposed such surcharge on container vessels several times. The last surcharge, \$50 against each container, was imposed in 1999.

The operators claim that the

amount of surcharge is negligible compared to their loss due to delay in loading and unloading of goods at the port.

According to the feeder operators on average a dozen ships wait at the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port every day. The main reason for such ship congestion is a steady 20-25 per cent annual growth in export-import business in the country.

But the facilities at Chittagong Port have not been increased to cope with the rising demand for export-import trade, the operators said.

The port authority has recently installed four gantry cranes to accelerate loading and unloading of containers. But according to sources, only 7-8 containers are being handled per hour with the cranes against their standard performance rate of 20 containers.

On the other hand, the sources alleged, there is hardly any space left at the port yard as a section of importers use it as warehouse making delay in receiving their goods. Customs authorities also do not allow any container to go outside the yard.

More than 46 container ships are operated along four routes connecting the port of Chittagong with Singapore, Port Klang and Port Pala Pas in Malaysia and Colombo in Sri Lanka.

Inflation raises

FROM PAGE 1

March from 5.53 percent in February.

Inflation rate rose by 0.28 percentage point in case of non-food items and stood at 6.56 percent in March while it was 6.28 percent in February.

Sources said the below-target production of Aman rice, devaluation of taka, decline in import of essentials and crises of petroleum products, power and fertiliser have resulted in the rise of inflation rate.

Besides, Bangladesh Bank sources said non-economic factors have also contributed to the upward trend of prices. Syndicated market control is one such factor which, various quarters alleged, the government failed to control.

Aman production this fiscal year was predicted to be 1.12 crore tonnes but sources said actual production was 1.08 crore tonnes. In the previous fiscal year, Aman production suffered due to devastating floods but still the output totalled 98 lakh tonnes. In FY 04, Aman output stood at 1.15 crore tonnes. It shows Aman production this year was less than what is normally produced.

During March-April, taka was devalued by about 5 to 6 percent against dollar from December. While this has had an impact on the prices of imported essentials, import of those and many other consumer goods also dropped during this period.

According to statistics of opening of letter of credit (L/C), import of consumer goods declined by 35

percent during July-February period of this fiscal year from that during the corresponding period of last year. Import of rice and wheat declined by 52 percent.

Although the government did not raise prices of petroleum products recently, they were sold at much higher rates all over the country, resulting in rise of transportation cost and consequently prices of consumer goods.

Moreover, continued loadshedding of power and fertiliser crisis raised prices of both agricultural and industrial products.

According to the TCB which monitors price level in Dhaka market, price of coarse rice yesterday was 3 percent more than that on the corresponding day last year. The price rise of wheat was 8 percent, soyabean oil 4 percent, lentil 24 percent, potato 123 percent, garlic 97 percent and onion 60 percent over this period.

Besides, prices of other essentials including fish and meat have also risen by 10 to 13 percent.

In March, inflation rate in rural areas was 6.27 percent compared to 5.67 percent in February.

For food items, the rate was 5.72 percent in March and 5.00 percent in February and for non-food items, it was 7.20 percent in March and 6.86 percent in February.

In March, the inflation rate in urban areas was 5.94 percent against 5.80 percent in February.

Nepali Maoists

FROM PAGE 20

were currently held.

The Royal Nepalese Army website details 53 people on its "most wanted" list of Maoists, headed by Prachanda.

Once deadly foes, the political brokers and the Maoists late last year brokered a loose alliance against King Gyanendra to challenge his absolute rule proclaimed in February 2005.

They brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets.

The monarch, the constitutional head of the army, backed down in the face of mass protests, which left at least 17 people dead, and recalled parliament last week after a four-year break.

The politicians immediately backed plans to call elections to a body to rewrite the constitution and limit the powers of the king -- a key demand of the Maoists who began their "people's war" in 1996 to overthrow the monarchy.

Constant battles between the rural-based Maoists and the security forces have resulted in a stalemate although Gyanendra had vowed to crush the rebellion after he sacked the government.

Analysts say the Maoists do not have the ability to take the towns and cities while the under-equipped army cannot defeat the rebels in their often mountainous rural strongholds.

Before the government's ceasefire call, Prachanda on Wednesday ruled out disarming his forces and launched a scathing attack on the nation's new political leadership in comments posted on the organisation's website.

Prachanda said it would be "suicidal" for his fighters to disarm after a decade-long insurgency while armed forces remained ready for action.

Robbers loot travel agency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Robbers looted around 2,000 tickets, 200 passports and Tk 8.5 lakh in cash in foreign and local currencies from a travel agency on Wednesday midnight.

Police and sources said the robbery occurred sometime at midnight at Concord International at the Shahid Suhrawardy Road, which is about 100 yards off the Kotwali Police Station.

"The gang of robbers entered inside by breaking a portion of the rear wall of our office," Mahfuzur Rahman, manager of Concord, said.

The robbers took away Tk 8 lakh, \$500, 200 passports with visas, 1500 non-issued tickets and 200 issued tickets of different airlines, he said.

Abu Jafar, the owner of Concord, said the incident would put his travel agency in great trouble.

D-8 Summit

FROM PAGE 20

official visit on Sunday.

Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey are the eight developing nations that comprise the D-8.

Commerce secretary and some high officials will accompany the foreign minister at the summit to discuss the framework of an agreement on trade, a senior official told The Daily Star yesterday. The trade agreement is likely to be signed at the summit after discussion.

The summit will be preceded by the meeting of senior officials of the member countries, which will discuss trade preferences and import duty concessions for D-8 members.

Official sources said the meeting will not discuss products, but will try to develop a framework and guidelines on how to lower tariffs.

The D-8, established in Istanbul on June 15, 1997, aims to develop the economies of the member countries as well as to create new trade opportunities, promote participation in decision-making at international fora and provide better life standard.

Bus strike

FROM PAGE 20

state-run buses are plying the routes in the greater interest of people.

"But we are ready to talk to the leaders of private bus and minibus owners and workers to reach an amicable solution," he told the news agency.

"I invited the leaders to a talk on Monday (May 8) and I believe they will respond to my invitation," the BRTC chairman said.

PM leaves

FROM PAGE 20

at the invitation of Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. She will also call on Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Jabir Al-Ahmad Al Jabir Al Sabah during her visit.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin and other high officials will accompany the prime minister.

Lawmaker

FROM PAGE 1

draft list although it should have been at the top as I am the sitting lawmaker from the constituency," he said, asking the authorities to cancel the draft.

Referring to his fellow lawmaker Mirza Azam's Wednesday speech in the House, Ekabbar said, "Mirza Azam's name was also dropped from the draft list and he showed a copy of the list in the House."

BDR rescues

FROM PAGE 20

before a magistrate's court last evening.

POLICEVERSION

Islam Iqbal, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, said an organized gang has been involved with human trafficking for several years. They lure needy people into seeking jobs in India.

The law enforcement agencies of Rajshahi region were alerted after police rescued five children and arrested two traffickers from the city's Bara Bangram area on Tuesday, police sources said.

THE RESCUED

Among the rescued people Rabiul Islam Sheikh, 35, his wife Nasima Khatun, 28, their son Habibullah Sheikh, 8, daughter Moslema Khatun, 4, hailed from Nawapara in Jessore.

Alima Begum, 35, Shahina Khatun, 18, were from Kharabat area of Khulna city while Ramjan Ali, 18, hailed from Pangsan in Rajbari.

Ajmira Khatun, 35, her son Noman Hossain 14, her daughters Sharmina Akhtar, 12, and Armina Akhtar, 8, Mira Begum, 35, Hasan Sheikh, 14, hailed from Bhandarkot upazila, Akser Ali, 26, his wife Shahida Begum, 23, his daughter Rajmoni, 5, his sons Maruf Billah, 10, Raju, 3, from Batia Ghata upazila, Rabia Khatun, 20, from Kaliganj in Shammagar upazila of Khulna.

Baby Khatun, 40, Meherunnesa, 35, Rebeka Begum, 8, Adari Begum, 25, Sagari Khatun, 6, her sister Shayamoli Khatun, 18, of Dighalia, Noorjahan, 35, Reba Khatun, 32, Minarul, 10, Nazim, 3, of Talbaria, Shahana Begum, 28, Sharmila, 7 of Dhulailata of Lohagara upazila in Narail, Kulsom Begum, 22, Champa Begum, 6, of Hatbaria in Narail Sadar upazila were also among the victims.

Heroin smuggling

FROM PAGE 1

Mainuddin told the NBR investigators last year that the company and anyone of the company had no contact with Nazmul after he was sacked in May last year.

But the investigators found that Nazmul had made numerous calls on the mobiles of Mainuddin and other officials and employees of King and Company after his sacking.

"Mainuddin could not give any satisfactory answer when investigators asked him why he gave false statement earlier," the NBR report said.

The NBR report also said Mainuddin did not cooperate with the investigators. He also did not disclose who owns the 'mysterious' mobile phone over which Mainuddin and Nazmul had talked several times.

Besides Nazmul, CID has arrested three others including a manager of BD Corporation, another sister concern of BD Foods.

Of them, Kazi Zafar Reza, owner of