

Power projects

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season and even consider day-light saving plan to meet the power shortage immediately.

The CG should also consider shuffling the manpower in the power ministry and Power Development Board (PDB) since these are still being controlled by the same people who had served the alliance government and failed to deliver. Professionals who were side-tracked during the coalition rule should be given appropriate posts to utilise their services.

Former energy minister Lt Gen (ret'd) Nooruddin Khan emphasised the need for reducing system loss of Power Development Board (PDB) by extensively using pre-paid metering system and recovering defaulted electricity bills.

He suggested installation of independent power plants with 10-30 megawatt capacity by Rural Electrification Board (REB) and Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO).

"The Desco and REB should be empowered to generate power by installing power plants on their own," Nooruddin said. The private sector should be provided a buy-back guarantee, otherwise private companies will not be interested to invest in power sector, he added.

Nooruddin recommended that the government should reinstate the nuclear power project, tap alternative sources of energy and install more coal-based power plants instead of gas-based ones.

Former state minister for power Maj Gen (ret'd) Anwarul Kabir Talukder blamed the immediate past government for lack of leadership at both political and technical levels, and said the ultimate responsibility for failures in this sector goes to the political leadership.

Talukder underscored bringing to book all those who misappropriated huge amounts of money leading the sector to destruction.

"The anti-corruption moves should be started from top levels. If the top persons of any organisation are honest, corruption would reduce by 80 percent. If all ministers of a government are corruption-free, secretaries and other bureaucrats will become free of corruption," he said.

Power sector lacks appropriate infrastructure which is essential for its uninterrupted and standard service, he said. He suggested reforming the infrastructure and urged fresh appointment of experts for creating fresh leadership.

The former state minister also suggested more financial and administrative independence of the power plants to take prompt decisions.

About 200 MW electricity can be saved if the non-technical systems loss or theft can be reduced to 10 percent from 21 percent, he noted.

Talukder recommended installation of system capacitor and mass use of energy saving bulbs to save another 200 MW power.

He emphasised the need for technical audit at all power plants which, he said, would save around 500 MW power in the national grid.

Tawfique-e-Elahi Choudhury, former secretary of the energy division, demanded publication of a white paper on corruption in power sector.

He recommended immediate signing of some big power plant contracts with due diligence. The authorities should inform general people about the crisis of power.

Hasina asks NBR

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for the tainted image of the politicians.

The AL chief urged people to free the country from black money, corruption, terrorism, grenade attacks and those who have 'suddenly turned into politicians'.

Talking on the prevailing situation, she said, "The unquenchable greed of the previous BNP-Jamaat government pushed us to these straits. They wanted to enjoy their ill-gotten wealth through holding a farcical election on January 22, but failed."

"We've to identify who grabbed people's wealth in last five years. Otherwise, we can't save our country," Hasina said.

Welcoming the decision that the law enforcers will need to obtain permission of the advisory committee on law and order first before evicting slums, the AL president requested the caretaker administration not to evict the slum dwellers without making arrangements for their rehabilitation.

The present caretaker government is the outcome of their movement, she said adding "We've to fight for people's social, cultural and economic freedom."

Hasina also urged the caretaker government to uphold people's voting, constitutional and human rights.

Senior AL leaders Abdul Jalil, Tofail Ahmed, Mottia Chowdhury, Obaidul Kader, Abdul Mannan and Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin were present during the meeting. Alamgir Kumum, Abdul Matin Bhuiyan, ATM Shamsuzzaman, architect Yafis Osman, poets Rabindra Gope, Dani Sedak, Rafiq Azad and Aslam Sani were the representatives from Bangalee Sangskritik Mancha.

and seek their cooperation in averting possible Kansat-like situation in future, he said.

"If the BERC could be functional, it would help settlement of disputes between the PDB and power consumers, and customers could lodge complaints with the BERC," Tawfique felt.

Former PDB chairman Nooruddin M Kamal urged the government to set up all fresh power plants in western region of the country as most of the existing ones are located in eastern zone. He also suggested separating the national grid in eastern and western zones.

"If the government can separate the eastern and western power generation zones, the whole country will not face blackout at a time because of national grid failure."

Nooruddin recommended introduction of private sector power policy and small power plant policy, which have remained shelved for the last five years.

Calling for a transparent and prompt initiative to cut systems loss, he said, "A substantial quantum of power can be saved by reducing systems loss."

Immediate past PDB chairman ANM Rezwan said the government should set the tariff structure of the PDB so as to make it cost effective and commercially viable. Otherwise, existence of the PDB will be threatened.

"The PDB can run profitably and go for fresh power production with its own fund if the tariff structure is set with 10 percent profit. Power is now sold at Tk 2.19 per unit while the cost is approximately Tk 4.5," Rezwan said.

He recalled that during his long stay at the PDB, he faced political and other pressures that seriously affected bidding for fresh power plants or any other government work.

Rezwan strongly suggested immediate floating of bids for establishing some big power plants during the tenure of the CG which can operate without any political interference.

He also stressed more independence of government organisations as bureaucratic process is another barrier to implementation of any projects hurriedly.

Summit Group Chairman Aziz Khan urged the government to consider raising bank financing provision to 50 percent from 15 percent now.

"Donors community and other overseas financing agencies are eager to invest in the power sector. The country will require \$3.5 billion in the next five years to produce another 5,000 megawatt power," he added.

He suggested immediate implementation of the power sector master plan and private sector power policy, and raising capital from Dhaka Stock Exchange.

Associate professor at the IBA of Dhaka University Munir Khasru pointed out that corruption has eaten up growth of the power sector, and various donor-driven procurement guidelines were used by corrupt people to legitimise their corruption. He cited examples of the Harbin deal in which procurement guidelines were used to legitimise the Chinese company's misdeeds.

Citing an instance, Khasru said the design section of the PDB, where an expert should not serve for more than two years, was full of people serving for more than five years. "They are experts in dodging guidelines."

Urging the private sector to shun corruption, Khasru said it was resorting to corrupt practices as much as the public sector.

Globelec Plant Manager of Haripur Power Limited Md Reaz Uddin stressed allowing long overdue maintenance work at various power plants and warned that otherwise dire consequences of sudden shutdown of those would follow.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tap atomic, solar and hydro power potentials
- Improvement of the management and leadership in the sector
- Frame a power sector vision statement addressing both business and strategic issues for national growth
- Power tariff should be made cost effective and viable for the sector
- Determine policy for private-public sector power generation ratio
- Bigger role of the private sector in the growth of the power sector
- Cash-strapped government entities like PDB should be given adequate fund to run commercially
- The government should continue drive to disconnect illegal power consumers and penalise the offenders
- Leaving professional decisions to professionals, empowering the experts in power deals
- Strong measures against financial and intellectual corruption in the sector that stand as the main impediment to the sector's growth
- Strict enforcement of the Public Procurement Act
- Ensuring quality consumer service through a law for consumers' welfare association

US State Dept official meets Abbas

AP, Ramallah

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered a defiant message to a US envoy yesterday, saying that the world would have to learn to live with a new coalition between his Fatah movement and the Islamic militant Hamas.

The alliance has raised concerns in the United States, and American officials have told Abbas they would shun any Palestinian government that does not explicitly recognise Israel, according to Abbas' aides. The platform of a Hamas-Fatah government agreed at a meeting in Mecca last week only contains a vague promise to "respect" previous peace deals with Israel, at best implying recognition.

"President Abbas told David Welch that the Mecca agreement was the only possible agreement and the world must deal with it," Abbas' aide Nabil Abu Rdenah said, after the meeting in Ramallah with Welch, a senior State Department official. Abbas is to host Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Sunday and attend a three-way meeting Monday with Rice and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"In the three-way meeting with Olmert and Rice, President Abbas is going to say that this government should be given a chance," Abu Rdenah said.

Eviction drives

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the advisory committee on law and order.

Prior approval would also be required for such drives in district and upazila levels from the district committee on law and order.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk), Dhaka City Corporation and Bangladesh Railway (BR) officials said they had to put their yesterday's drives on hold after they read the news in newspapers.

"Before today's [yesterday] pre-scheduled drive, we discussed the matter with our director general (DG) and he advised to put a hold on it and wait for the directive," said Delwar Hossain, divisional estate officer and first class magistrate of BR.

He also said they started processing documents to seek permission from the committee and they were hopeful to resume the drive within this week.

Rajuk magistrate ASM Emdadul Dastagir told The Daily Star that Rajuk had to stop its ongoing drive following the government directive.

"Although we do not have the official order, Rajuk chairman, after discussing the matter with secretary of housing and public works ministry, decided to pause the drive and wait for copy of the order," Dastagir said adding that Rajuk would comply to the government instruction.

Against the backdrop of country-wide eviction drives, the government decision to make different authorities acquire prior approval for eviction drives came from a meeting of the advisory committee on law and order on February 14, said a press release of the home ministry on Friday.

4 cops closed

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The cops were on patrol duty on Sherpur-Jamalpur road on Friday night. They held college student Jinu and his friend while they were returning to the town in a motor-bike. The cops threatened to implicate the boys in a robbery case.

Later, the cops took Tk 500 in bribe from the boys and set them free. The boys complained to the superintendent of police (SP) who immediately investigated and probed the allegation.

Army offers

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the voter identity cards 'a good one'.

As part of the ongoing consultations for the preparation of voter ID cards, the presentation by the army representatives was made on the basis of their field level experiences at home and abroad, said a government handout.

Later, the national committee on voter ID cards made another presentation at the same venue.

"These are part of a series of presentations to be made before the council of advisers on the subject to assist the government and the Election Commission to take a decision on the matter," said the handout.

The EC is waiting for the government's opinion to decide whether the voter list will be prepared with identity cards or with photographs, sources said, adding that the EC will sit today to finalise a set of proposals for electoral reforms.

Earlier an adviser to the caretaker government said they would take decision on voter identity cards in early March after receiving the report from the national expert committee.

In 1994, providing the voters with identity cards was made mandatory by amending the Representation of the People Act. The EC was given the authority to provide the voters with the ID cards. But the project failed to achieve the goals due to massive financial irregularities and corruption.

Prof Yunus

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About 'Shakti Doi' (yoghurt) produced at Grameen-Danone factory, he said, "It's a great venture that caters for nutrition needs of the children living in poverty but we must stay alert so that the product does not reach the richer segments of the society in Dhaka, Chittagong or other big cities."

"We have plans to build many more institutions or firms like Grameen-Danone where the poor will own shares," he announced amidst huge applause from the crowd.

The winner of Nobel Peace Prize 2004 emphasised the need for detecting the reasons for poverty first and urged all to work together to do away with those.

On the allegation that Grameen Bank charges higher interest rates, he said, "It concerns all of us and we always try to keep the rates as low as possible."

"The Bank had set out to ensure the wellbeing of the poor not to suck money from them," he said adding, "It's remarkable that they [poor] are the real owners of this bank and the profit it makes goes directly into their purse, not into the pockets of bank staff."

Former adviser of the caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan in his speech lauded Dr Yunus for his unique ideas. He said the microcredit pioneer has proved that the poor never fail to return loans while the richer ones gobble up the loan money quite frequently.

"His compassion for the poor, his close association with them and his simple lifestyle have taken him to new heights and the success of the Grameen Bank lies in its rare excellence in management capacity," Dr Akbar said.

Terming Yunus a fighter economist, he said that the Grameen Bank today is not only a successful and competent institution but also a social movement and all this has been possible because of some new ideas, conceptions and visions.

"Dr Yunus was the first one to

discover something extraordinary in our poor women who in return have stunned the world with their creativity and that too in a seriously gender-discriminated society like ours," observed the former finance adviser.

Citing the disorderly situation in the loan system at nationalised commercial banks (NCB), he said, "The finance ministers who speak loud against the higher interest rates of the Grameen Bank fail miserably to arrange a meagre loan for the poor through the NCBs."

He alleged that a large portion of microcredit loans has not been used the way it should have been. A huge sum of the microcredit loan has been frittered away. He urged the government to launch a drive against those practices.

Dr Akbar hailed Dr Yunus' decision to join politics and said, "I consider it a bold step. The evil force will overrun us if the honest people continue to remain onlookers."

Former BEA President Dr Moinul Islam said the interest rates for the Grameen Bank loans are much higher and urged Dr Yunus to bring it down further.

He stressed the need for eradicating the social discrimination before poverty alleviation.

"Poverty is being created by the state and politics through many ways including rampant plundering of the money taken in loans," he said.

"Big loan defaulters have eaten up 77 percent of the loan money by using the amount in politics and through the loopholes in the so-called system of writing off and rescheduling debts," he noted.

He alleged that former finance minister Saifur Rahman was the 'chief patron' of this evil syndicate.

BEA, Chittagong President Professor Sikander Khan chaired the seminar addressed among others by Grameen Trust Managing Director Professor Huzzatul Islam Latif and BEA, Chittagong General Secretary Khorsheedul Alam Quaderi.

Civic movement

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DMDP as to why they failed to complete their job.

Founding President of Bapa AMA Muhit said, "Now, we fervently appeal to the caretaker administration to separate Rajuk from its role of a real estate developer. Rajuk must play the role of a monitoring body, enforce the city planning and design policies."

Former adviser to the caretaker government advocate Sultana Kamal emphasised the need for forming a public forum and an action plan for people's movement against influential land grabbers.

Beautiful rivers like the Buriganga, Shitalakha, Bangshi, Turag, Balu and Dhaleswari encircle Dhaka city as its lifelines, said Vice-President of Bapa Prof Abdullah Abu Sayed, who chaired the discussion.

"We have to protect the wetlands and flood plains for the sake of Dhaka's existence," he said.

Ishrat Islam, an associate professor of the department of Urban and Regional Planning of Buet, in her presentation said there are more than 250 real estate developers active in and around the capital.

Different types of wetlands in Dhaka are depleting fast due to illegal land development. A total of 87 ongoing private housing projects have no approval, she said. Around 49 housing projects have been identified to be inside the flood plain zones and sub-flood plain zones earmarked in the DMDP covering around 9,241 acres of land, she added.

"Wetlands have been disappearing at 5.67 percent a year since 1999," said Ishrat, who also conducted a study from 1989 on wetlands of Beraid, Ashulia and Baghair (Keraniganj) areas. "There will be no wetlands left by the year 2037 if commercial land development went on in the present pace," she said.

Ishrat said 44.7 percent of the affected people said they were forced

to give up their land to developers while 26 percent said they were forced to sell their lands, as the developers dumped sand on their lands.

"A total of 96 percent affected people in Baghair, 91 percent in Beraid and 73 percent in Ashulia want to protect their ancestral homestead from the aggression of the real estate developers," Ishrat said.

A total of 19,134 square feet of wetland is lost every day in Beraid, 7,161 square feet in Baghair and 2,446 in Ashulia, she said adding that, no housing projects in the city's eastern fringe have approval.

Deputy Town Planner of Rajuk Abu Hasan Mortuza said 34 housing projects got approval long before the Private Housing Land Development Rules of 2004 were formulated.

"Rajuk alone cannot implement the DMDP and enforce the private housing development rules," he added.

The experts participating in the discussion recommend coordination between Rajuk, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) and Water Development Board to implement the DMDP and the DAP.

They also emphasised the need for participation of civic bodies in the process of drawing up the city's development plan.

"An authority with executive power is crucial to conserve the city's flood plains, lakes, canals and wetlands as per the DMDP," said Ishrat Islam.

Bela Director Syeda Rizwana Hasan alleged that documents go missing from Rajuk when legal action is initiated against an illegal housing project.

Engineer Quamrul Islam Siddique, Editor of daily New Age Nurul Kabir, Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) President Abdul Awal, former adviser to the caretaker government SM Shahjahan and NGO activist Khushi Kabir also spoke among others.

EC reform

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The move for inclusion of the EC Secretariat officers in the mainstream administration was initiated in 1982 following a recommendation from the erstwhile public administration reform committee.

"The Election Commission enjoys the status and privileges of a Secretariat Division. It is, therefore, not fair to keep its officers out side the main stream of the service cadre. To meet the end of justice as well as to remove certain problems faced by it in the transaction of its day-to-day business, the committee recommends the following measures for implementation: The officers of the commission be included in the Bangladesh Civil Service (Secretariat) Cadre," said the public administration reform committee in its report in 1982.

Following the recommendation the EC Secretariat back then negotiated with the establishment ministry on several occasions to persuade the ministry to implement it. But the process was stalled.

Later in 1998, the EC again proposed creation of a separate cadre service for the election administration. Responding to the EC's proposal, the establishment ministry in a letter on August 30, 1998 informed the commission that the government was carefully

examining the proposal.

Former CEC MA Syed also on May 21, 2005 submitted a proposal to the president for creation of an election cadre with an independent EC Secretariat to strengthen the election administration. The EC Secretariat also sent a letter to the establishment ministry on May 26, 2005 inquiring about the progress of the process of creating a Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS -- Election) Cadre.

The Establishment ministry on July 25, 2005 in a letter informed the EC that there was no government decision or recommendation for creation of a BCS (Election) Cadre.

Referring to the EC officers and staffs rules of 1979, the EC Secretariat officials said the government will not have to spend extra money if it wants to create an election cadre or to include the EC Secretariat officers in the mainstream civil administration.

The rules stipulate, "The post in the Election Commission Secretariat shall carry such scales of pay and other emoluments as are carried by a person appointed thereto shall enjoy such power, terms and conditions of service as are enjoyed by the holders of the corresponding post in the secretariat."

Rice in Iraq applauds military crackdown

Car bombings kill 10

REUTERS, Baghdad

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made an unannounced visit to Baghdad on Saturday, arriving as American and Iraqi troops make early gains in a new crackdown against militants in the Iraqi capital.

"They are off to a good start," Rice, whose plane circled over Baghdad for half an hour before landing, said of the military operation.

"The Baghdad security plan is just beginning to unfold and I think it is important to realize it was not ever intended to be a single day, but to ramp up over time," she told reporters. She added it was important for the Iraqi authorities to use the "breathing space" well.

But in fresh violence in the northern city of Kirkuk, a double car bombing killed at least 10 people and wounded 60 in a crowded market, police sources said.

The explosions took place in the Rahim Awa district, a predominantly Kurdish area of the ethnically mixed city. Several cars and shops were burned out.

Rice, who will later go on to Jerusalem, would meet various officials during her Iraq visit, a US embassy spokesman said.

She is scheduled to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Jerusalem on Monday.

The top US diplomat arrived in Baghdad a day after the US House of Representatives denounced President George W Bush's decision to send more troops to help with the Baghdad offensive. The move was a symbolic challenge to Bush's unpopular war.

US and Iraqi forces sweeping through Baghdad have encountered little resistance to an operation seen as a final effort to quell violence threatening to tear Iraq apart.

Sirajul Hossain

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secretary of Bangladesh Samik Federation.

During the Liberation War, he was an active member of Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Samannay Parishad.

Khan will be buried at his family graveyard at Baniachong under Habiganj district today, family sources said.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has expressed deep shock at the death of Sirajul Hossain Khan.

In a condolence message yesterday, Khaleda said Sirajul Hossain was an uncompromising leader of the progressive political movement in the country.

She prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

Naser Rahman

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bridges and culverts.

He further alleged that Naser Rahman, son of former finance minister M Saifur Rahman, demanded Tk 2 crore in toll from him. "As I didn't give him the money, Naser first threatened me and then had my five contracts cancelled by abusing his power in October 20, 2003" he said.

Four days after cancellation of the contracts, Nuruzzaman held a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity office, making public what actually happened in this regard.

"Outraged by this", Nuruzzaman said, "Naser filed a defamation case against me in October 28. Later, I secured an anticipatory bail from the High Court."

Besides, he alleged, police picked up him and tortured him in Sirimangal Police Station "at the behest of Naser".

"I had brought the matter to the notice of Saifur Rahman to have a solution, but he didn't pay heed to my request," Nuruzzaman said, adding that he did not dare to file any case against Naser at that time.

He went on: "I submitted the FIR in which I've requested the authorities concerned to take legal action against the people who harassed me in many ways."

When contacted, Kotwali police said the FIR filed by Nuruzzaman needs further investigation. They said Sub-Inspector (SI) Nazimuddin will investigate the case.

Malaysian police

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for foreigners last year, which accounted for some two per cent of the 232,620 cases recorded.

Official statistics have shown that criminal incidents jumped 45.1 percent in three years since 2003.

Musa said that the police would also step up border security to stop the influx of illegal immigrants.

"Enforcement at border checkpoints and entry points will be enhanced because it is difficult to control the illegal immigrants' movement once they entered the country," Musa said.

Malaysia is one of the largest importers of foreign labour in Asia. Foreign workers, both legal and illegal, accounted for about 2.6 million of its 10.5 million workforce, officials have said.

They supply the workforce needed in Malaysia's agricultural, construction, manufacturing and services sectors.

Relief goods found

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2001, however managed to evade arrest.

Acting on a tip-off, the joint forces raided the house on Kalia road in Jaldhaka at around 8:45pm.

The forces found the roof of a room, built with the two-storied house, made of CI sheets of relief fund. "On each of the 110 CI sheets recovered from the house, there are seals of Relief and Rehabilitation Department and imprints 'relief goods, not for sale,' a policeman told The Daily Star.

Earlier at 8:00pm, the joint forces raided Ideal College in Jaldhaka and found 54 similar CI sheets piled up there.

The joint forces found the roof of one of the college rooms made of similar CI sheets and were unbolting those as of filing this report at 9:00pm.

The aforesaid former Jamaat MP is the chairman of the college governing body while Nayeab-e-amir of Jamaat's Jaldhaka unit Moulana Azizul Islam is the principal of the college.

The joint forces also recovered 40 such CI sheets from the Jaldhaka Jamaat office and 10 CI sheets from Al-Falah Academy, a Jamaat-run institution.

Another team of the joint forces raided the house of Jamaat Rokon Latif at 8:00pm and recovered 22 pieces of CI sheets for relief work that was kept for sale.

The joint forces led by a first class magistrate were continuing their raids in the district as of filing this report last night.

In another drive, more than 100 CI sheets meant for relief were seized from the house of BNP activist Abdur Rahim, who is also a madrasa teacher in Daulatkhan upazila. Rahim went into hiding to avoid arrest.

Our staff correspondent reported from Sylhet that the law enforcers seized a large quantity of CI sheets and biscuits of government relief fund from the village house of former BNP lawmaker Shafi Ahmed Chowdhury at Daudpur on Friday night and yesterday.</