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City in grip of power outages

500MW shortfall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Life in the capital became miserable yesterday with the mercury rising and the effects worsened by frequent power cuts.

About 3,800 megawatts (MW) of power was generated in the country yesterday against the demand of 4,300MW, causing an official shortfall of 500MW. However, sources say that the shortfall was 1,000MW yesterday.

Problems in gas supply to power stations also contributed to the power outages.

The power plants running on natural gas have a demand of around 800 million cubic feet of gas a day, but they are currently receiving around 642 million cubic feet of gas a day.

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Treatment of Hasina's ear, eye starts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The treatment of the ears and eyes of detained Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina finally started at the city's Square Hospitals where she has been undergoing treatment since March 11.

Echo test was performed on Hasina's ears yesterday as a primary step and several other tests would be carried out today. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Prisons Major Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told reporters at the hospital.

He went to visit Hasina at the hospital at about 5:00pm and stayed there for about an hour and enquired about Hasina's health.

Hasina, a former prime minister and the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

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2 die as storm lashes capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least two people were killed as a storm lashed the capital last night at around 10:30pm.

An unidentified youth aged around 17 died when a billboard fell on him in front of Dhaka College during the storm. A housewife, Hanufa Begum, 35, died after a wall of her house at Muradnagar in Shyamspur collapsed on her.

A number of trees were also uprooted in the storm that brought down the heat of the last few days.

Sanaul Haque, a meteorologist at the Dhaka Met office, told The Daily Star last night the highest wind speed in the capital was recorded at 93 kph.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Boats ply through the black water of Narai river at Trimchoni of Khilgaon in the capital. The river has been polluted due to unabated dumping of industrial waste and sewage.

Rivers of pollution surround Dhaka

Surface waters turn pitch black for industrial waste, human excreta; govt warning blatantly overlooked

PINAKI ROY

The government over the years has allowed industrialists to pollute the rivers, canals and wetlands in and around the city to such an extent that surface water turned pitch black in several spots.

Pollution has set in on the Buriganga, Shitalakhya and Balu rivers and made it almost impossible to treat the water. The Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), is supplying stinky water by purifying it with chlorine and ammonium sulfate.

The military-backed caretaker government had earlier directed industrialists to install 'effluent treatment plants' (ETP) at their respective industries by October 31 last year.

But most of the industrialists

have defied the directive and the government also did not take action against any of the violators. Even the Department of Environment (DoE) does not know much about it.

"We even don't know how many industries are active in and around the city as no survey has been conducted in recent years. We don't have sufficient manpower or funds to monitor industries," said a high official from DoE asking not to be named.

Besides industry-generated liquid and solid waste, most of the human excreta directly goes down the rivers through underground pipeline as nearly 70 percent houses are not connected to the excrete treatment plant in Pagla.

A DoE source said around 350 dyeing, tannery, chemicals,

paper and food processing, and other industries are polluting the water severely.

Waste from these industries is connected with the sewerage system that directly goes into the rivers around the city. In fact, the rivers have become a dumping ground of all kinds of solid, liquid and chemical waste of bank-side population.

According to the Environment Conservation Rule, 1997, every industry should have in-house ETP. Otherwise, they would not get environmental clearance from the DoE which is mandatory to obtain power and gas connections.

The DoE has the authority to implement the law but shortage of manpower prevents it from taking action.

"We have only two inspectors to

cover industries in 16 districts. They also don't have vehicles for field-level inspection. How can you expect the inspectors will work properly?" said Neyamatullah Bhuiyan, director, DoE Dhaka Division.

According to statistics from DoE, the number of polluting textile mills is 365, tanneries 198, pharmaceutical units 149, engineering workshops 129, chemical and pesticide factories 118, jute mills 92, rubber and plastic units 63, food and sugar 38, paper and pulp 10, cement and fertilizer five each and distilleries four.

In 2001, a report from DoE said Hazaribagh tanneries, an export-oriented cluster of industries, produce about 20,000 cubic metres of toxic waste laden with

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TALKS WITH CA

British PM for smooth transition of power to elected govt

UNB, London

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has underlined the importance of smooth transition of power to an elected government promptly following elections in Bangladesh.

Brown made the remark during a meeting with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at 10 Downing Street Tuesday afternoon.

A joint statement released after the meeting said the prime minister and the chief adviser agreed that credible elections that can sustain democracy in the longer term are essential for Bangladesh.

The chief adviser categorically reaffirmed his government's firm resolve to hold free, fair and credible parliamentary elections in Bangladesh by December 2008.

He informed the British prime



Gordon Brown

minister that the caretaker government would hold early dialogue with political parties and remove restrictions to enable them to fully participate in successful democratic parliamentary elections.

Both sides were happy to note

the good progress of the project to update the voter list.

The prime minister and the chief adviser agreed that strong public institutions, justice and observance of due process and human rights were the bedrock of a healthy democracy.

They observed with satisfaction the institutional reforms of the caretaker government to strengthen the mandate of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Election Commission and Public Service Commission, and to establish a human rights commission.

They agreed that public institutions should play a leading role in setting high standards of governance under the newly elected government and that it was vital for them to act with respect for international standards of due process

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Emon spills more beans about Babar

The ex-state minister 'hired' the criminal to kill his business partner

KAILASH SARKAR

Detained former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar allegedly hired Sanjivul Islam Emon to have his reported business partner Madan Municipality Chairman Shafiqul Islam Liton killed since he joined hands with Babar's rival former Awami League MP Haji Selim.

As Liton betrayed, Babar opposed his candidature in the municipality chairman election in 2002, sources said, quoting Emon's confession made before Criminal Investigation Department (CID) interrogators during his remand period.

Sources claimed Babar, abusing power, paved the way for Liton to fish in Netrakona haor areas depriving others. But, Liton joined hands with Selim to trade fish at the Karwan Bazar wholesale market in Dhaka.

Liton, former chairman of Khaliyaji upazila and former assistant personal secretary to Babar and Babar's cousin, controlled fishing in the haor area

during the BNP rule with Babar's assistance, according to sources. The fish were sold at Karwan Bazar wholesale market in Dhaka and Babar was given a large share of the profit, sources claimed.

After Liton joined Selim and started trading together, Babar became angry and opposed Liton's candidature in the municipality election held on October 26, 2002 and hired Emon to have Liton killed.

Sources said fish worth crores of taka were collected from Mohanganj, Madan, Khaliyaji and other haor areas in Netrakona each season. Since Babar was influential, none dared to fish in the wetlands.

Liton told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone that he had leased land from Haji Selim for fish-trading purposes.

"Even though there was a feud over the municipality election, I had no conflict with Babar over fishing and fish trading," he said.

A source close to Selim said, "Liton has been using Selim's

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Emergency to be lifted at right time: CA

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed has said the state of emergency will be lifted at an appropriate time in the transitional process.

The CA made the remark in an interview with the BBC in London Tuesday, facing a host of questions over the country's prevailing situation.

BBC Special Correspondent Nik Gowing also asked Fakhruddin when the army would return to barracks.

In reply, the head of the caretaker government said the army is assisting the caretaker government in improving the law and order, doing post-Sidr relief and rehabilitation work and preparing voter list to hold a free and fair election.

Fakhruddin said the army is working as a helping hand of the government in the fight against corruption and crimes, and particularly the army is playing an outstanding role in formulating a flawless voter list.

When asked about the reported deterioration of human rights situation in Bangladesh, the chief adviser said the human rights situation is much better than any other times of Bangladesh.

"The number of individual

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE IN RTI

Exemption should be specific to stop misuse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Instances of exemption from disclosure of information should be specified in the proposed Right to Information (RTI) ordinance to prevent its misuse, said visiting Indian Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah yesterday.

He put emphasis on computerising all government records and connecting them to a network for easy access and said the success of

the law depends a lot on it.

Habibullah, who has been leading Indian Central Information Commission since October 26, 2005, was sharing experiences of implementation of the Indian RTI Act at a roundtable meeting in Dhaka.

He described the draft RTI ordinance as stronger than the Indian act in terms of making the information commission more autonomous and holding accountable the entire private sector under

the RTI law. But he cautioned about the huge task of bringing the whole private sector under the law.

"My personal feeling is that it is desirable. But you need to think yourself whether you can manage it," Habibullah said.

While the Indian act only makes disclosing information to public compulsory only for government offices and other organisations that receive public fund, the draft of the RTI Ordinance 2008 covers

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NIKO GRAFT CASE Probe report to be placed even if Hasina's version not received

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigation report in the Niko graft case against detained former premier and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina and six others will be submitted within the predetermined time even if Hasina refuses to give statement in her defence.

The investigation report is to be submitted by March 26.

The Anti-Corruption

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ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH Ex-IOJ MP Mufti Shahidul gets 10yrs



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained former lawmaker and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) leader Mufti Shahidul Islam was sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for amassing illegal wealth yesterday.

The Special Court-7 also fined the IOJ leader, who has been behind bars since February 7 last year, Tk 10 lakh, defaulting on which will carry one more year in jail.

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PHOTO: STAR

A mobile court tears down advertisement boards of cigarettes at Rampura in the capital yesterday. The billboards were placed there despite the government ban on tobacco advertisement in the country.

Illegal billboards of tobacco products knocked down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court in an anti-smoking drive yesterday knocked down 12 illegal billboards of tobacco products installed in 12 shops in the city's Motijheel and Khilgaon areas.

It also fined the shop owners a total of Tk 2,400 for violating the 'Smoking and Tobacco Control Act-2005', which prohibits advertising of tobacco products in leaflets, handbills and billboards.

The mobile court led by Magistrate Kamruzzaman also fined two persons Tk 50 each for

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RICE EXPORT Indian customs still waiting for ministry order

A CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The Indian customs authorities yesterday held up the export of rice to Bangladesh through Benapole port at previous rate of \$ 505 a tonne as they are yet to receive written instructions from Indian central commerce ministry.

Although the central commerce ministry of India on Tuesday decided to export rice to Bangladesh at the previously fixed rate, the Indian customs authorities were not officially informed of

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