

LATEST BBC POLL

Two-thirds of Britons fear race violence

AFP, London

Around two-thirds of Britons fear race relations are so bad that they could spark violent clashes, according to a poll published by the BBC yesterday.

A total of 64 percent said they thought racial tensions were certain, very likely or fairly likely to result in violence.

Asked how much tension there is in Britain between different races and nationalities, 24 percent said a great deal, while 52 percent said a fair amount.

And 59 percent said that they either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the statement that there were too many immigrants in Britain.

In addition, 49 percent said that the government should encourage immigrants to leave Britain, compared to 43 percent who said they did not know or eight percent who did not know or declined to answer.

There have been a handful of racially-linked riots in Britain in recent years.

In 2005, groups of young Afro-Caribbean and Asian men clashed in Birmingham, central England, over two nights, leaving two people dead.

And in 2001, inter-racial violence saw groups of youths go on the rampage in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham in northern England, all

areas with large Asian populations. The study, whose findings were described as worrying by one leading equality campaigner, was commissioned to mark the 40th anniversary of a notorious speech by lawmaker Enoch Powell warning about the impact of immigration on Britain.

It came to be known as the "rivers of blood" speech because it contained the line: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood."

Trevor Phillips, the head of Britain's Equality and Human Rights Commission, told the BBC: "What worries me is if that friction starts to catch fire -- if people do genuinely believe it's going to catch fire -- then we're in trouble."

Immigration minister Liam Byrne told the broadcaster the government know the issue was a major concern and was introducing schemes including a points system to manage migration.

It was not clear whether the "violence" feared by those questioned referred to large-scale clashes or confrontations between individuals.

The study by pollsters MORI surveyed 1,000 people.

Maj Hafiz

FROM PAGE 1
the pro-reform group.

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by the chairperson, has told his colleagues that steps regarding action against Hafiz would be taken on instructions from the party chief. He said he would soon send a message to her.

"We won't spare anyone of those plotting against the party to serve the interests of certain quarters," a senior leader siding with Delwar told The Daily Star.

Pro-Khaleda faction, meantime, wants the demand for release of Khaleda and her two sons to be on the agenda for the meetings preparatory to the formal dialogue between government and political parties, said sources.

Following an SMS invitation from the caretaker government, the faction leaders on Thursday decided to join the pre-dialogue talks that might be held anytime this week.

They said their agenda for the meeting would be settled through further discussion at party forum.

"We would place a four-point demand including release of Khaleda Zia and her sons and withdrawal of the case against Tarique, his wife and mother-in-law," Hannan said.

On April 7, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman made a phone call to Rizvi Ahmed and invited Delwar group for talks. In reply to the invitation, the leaders said they needed the chairperson's consent before joining any dialogue with the government.

Then on Thursday, Delwar told reporters that he had got positive response from the party chief regarding meeting the advisers.

AL: Hasina

FROM PAGE 1
Presidium member Abdur Razzak, criticising the government's dual stand.

Speaking at the launching ceremony of Jail Week 2008 at the Prisons Directorate on Thursday, Home Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin said at this moment the government is not considering sending the detained AL president abroad for treatment.

Razzak yesterday demanded immediate unconditional release of Hasina, saying, "It will be good for both the nation and the caretaker government if immediate effective steps are taken to send our ailing party president abroad (for treatment)."

He was speaking at a signature campaign programme organised by Awami Jubo League at the party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue. Presidium member Amir Hossain Amu inaugurated the programme.

AL Presidium member Tofail Ahmed said if the government does not free Hasina immediately, there would be no alternative left for the party except launching movement.

He said the country's political arena is now unstable and Hasina's release is the only way to overcome the situation.

AL leader Suranjit Sengupta said, "If the home adviser's remark is correct, then the dialogue must fail." He urged the government to clear its stand on the matter.

AL Presidium member Motia Chowdhury said getting bail is a fundamental and democratic right of the people but the caretaker government has refused Hasina this right.

"If Sheikh Hasina is not freed through democratic ways, she will have to be freed through movement," she said.

Jubo League leader Dr Mizanur Rahman presided over the inauguration of the signature campaign. AL leaders Abdul Mannan and Advocate Quamrul Islam and Jubo League leaders Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury, Faruq Hossain, Abdus Sattar Masud, Ataur Rahman Ata and Mohiuddin Mahi, among others, spoke at the programme.

Food prices

FROM PAGE 16

Some countries, such as China, were in a strong position to allow their currencies to rise and should do so to help ease the pain from higher-priced food imports, he said.

Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia have partially "insulated" their economies from global commodity inflation "by allowing their currencies to rise in the last few years, he said.

However, he said "that may not be so good" for some countries such as Vietnam that have a large current account deficit.

While a steady stream of foreign direct investment has largely helped Hanoi, "allowing the currency to appreciate substantially might undermine competitiveness and that might further increase the current account deficit."

China, with a huge current account surplus and a very competitive economy, "has been allowing (its) currency to appreciate faster," he said.

Longer term, Kuroda said the solution to high food prices was raising productivity through increased government investments in the farm sector.

The ADB was a key player in infrastructure development in Asia and would help member countries with irrigation, electricity roads and other infrastructure that could boost farm production, he said.

Chicken prices

FROM PAGE 1

Rice prices, however, increased by Tk 10-15 per maund on the wholesale market Thursday following the government decision to procure Boro rice at Tk 28 a kg. Rural markets also witnessed price hike as well. Prices, however, did not increase further yesterday.

Edible oil prices saw fresh hike in last one week. The price of non-brand soya bean spiked by Tk 108-110 per kg which was sold for Tk 103-105 a week ago.

Super palm oil was selling for Tk 101-103 a kg yesterday. A week ago, it sold at Tk 95-96.

The price of per kg palm oil, which rose in both wholesale and retail markets, stood at Tk 97-98 yesterday while it was Tk 91-92 a week ago.

However, the price of green chili has decreased. Green chili was sold at Tk 6-7 per kg at Karwan Bazar wholesale market yesterday.

Akkas Ali, a farmer, told The Daily Star that he came to Karwan Bazar from Narsingdi as the price of chili fell considerably in Narsingdi.

Nepal Maoists

FROM PAGE 16

since last Thursday's polls.

"In history, monarchs have been beheaded and also had to flee. Let that not be repeated in Nepal," said the school teacher-turned-revolutionary.

Gyanendra ascended the throne in 2001 when his brother and predecessor, King Birendra, was shot dead along with eight other family members by a drunk and love-lorn crown prince, who in turn killed himself.

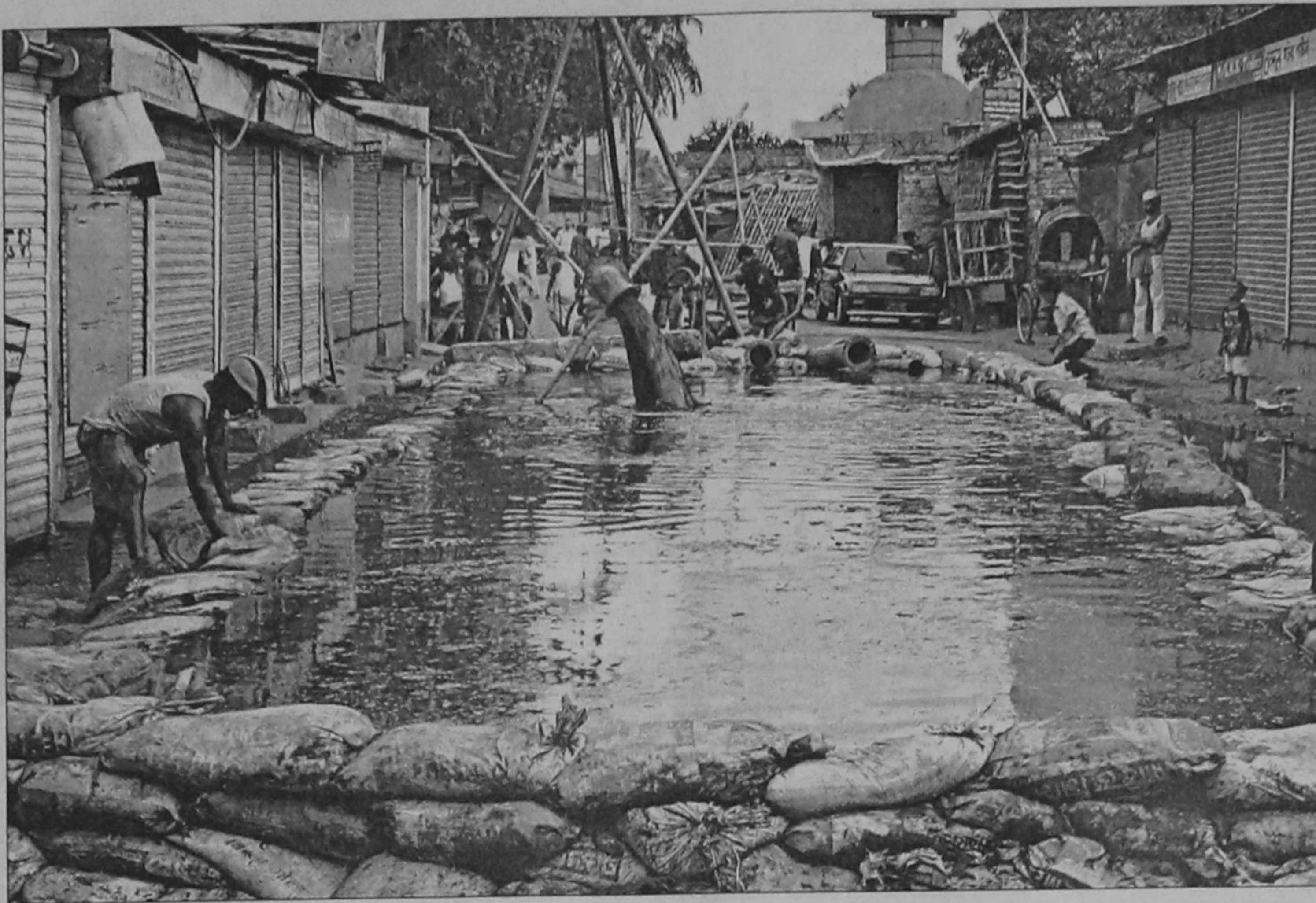
In 2005 he seized absolute power to fight the Maoists, but instead fuelled a wave of republican sentiment that led to a historic 2006 peace deal culminating in last week's polls.

Until two and a half years ago, Prachanda lived underground and was a terrorist wanted by Interpol.

The party he leads has now become Nepal's biggest, and is set to lead the country's next government.

With the count from the April 10 elections still in progress and 601 seats in a constitutional assembly up for grabs, the former rebels have won nearly half of the 240 seats allocated by the first-past-the-post system.

They are also on track to win around a third of the 335 seats allocated by proportional representation, election official Dilliram Bastola told AFP.



Workers of Dhaka Wasa pile up sandbags closing the box-culvert road at Kamalapur kitchen market yesterday to clean drains without using suction pipes. As a result, the environment has become heavy with the stink of garbage.

2 former secys

FROM PAGE 1

violating the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) only three hours after he was released from the Dhaka Central Jail.

Dr Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, who was accused along with former premier Sheikh Hasina in the barge-mount power plant corruption case, was produced before the court that sent him to jail.

Lutfur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Tejaon police station, told The Daily Star, "We arrested Dr Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury on Green Road on charges of the violating the EPR at about 10:00 am."

"Toufiq-e-Elahi was arrested as he was trying to assemble people violating the EPR," the OC said.

Sources said Dr Toufiq was released from the Dhaka Central Jail at about 7:00 am on bail in the barge-mount power plant corruption case filed with Tejaon police station on September 2, 2007.

Meanwhile, BNP chairperson's former secretary Khandaker Shahidul, who was accused along with Khaleda Zia in the Niko corruption case, was also sent to jail after the Anti-Corruption Commission officials arrested him from his Dhanmondi residence on Thursday night.

The ACC officials produced the former secretary before the court that sent him to jail. The court also asked the Dhaka Central Jail authorities to provide him with proper medical treatment and a division status in line with the jail code.

Shahidul's lawyers sought his bail but the court did not pass any order on the appeal. The lawyers also submitted Shahidul's medical certificates to the court.

They said there was no specific allegation against the former secretary.

The ACC filed the case against five people including former premier Khaleda Zia on Dec 9, 2007.

Earlier, the former energy secretary was sent to jail on January 16 after he surrendered before the court.

Army shouldn't

FROM PAGE 1

to identify specific spots where political parties can hold rallies.

He also said the Election Commission (EC) should employ volunteers for assisting the voters on the election day.

In Nepal, a total of 1.18 lakh volunteers were employed for assisting the voters, he said.

Hafizuddin, who led the team in Nepal under the banner of Bangladesh Manabdhikar Samannay Parishad, yesterday placed nine recommendations for holding the next general election peacefully.

AHM Noman, chairman of the Parishad, said the caretaker government should take all the necessary steps for holding a free, fair and credible election.

Parishad Director Advocate Muhammad Samsuddin, among others, was present.

Special tribunal

FROM PAGE 16

disposal, things got reversed," he said, adding, "Litigants have to return disappointed every day."

The 30-day time extension in the grenade attack case ended on February 14 and we had to seek further extension," Fokhor said.

Jail security

FROM PAGE 16

if it had been procured through the Army.

The 303 rifles, which are still working, will be used for training purposes while the defective ones will be sent to the Central Ordnance Depot (COD).

20 lakh deprived

FROM PAGE 1

About 1.40 lakh people buy rice every day three days a week from 687 OMS dealers across DCC areas. Under the programme, each dealer sells 5 kg of the staple to 204 people a day.

From today, 2.06 lakh people will be able to reap the benefit. Each dealer will sell rice to 300 people a day three days a week, said Pias Costa, director general of the food directorate.

Also from today, about 18 lakh people across the country will be able to buy rice from 6,800 OMS dealers.

Besides, 60 truckloads of rice are sold to 36,000 city dwellers every day four days a week under the direct sale programme of the food directorate.

Meanwhile, about 1.30 lakh people in the DCC areas are getting the benefit of buying rice from 75 BDR outlets each day six days a week.

Of the 17 unions, over 6 lakh people mostly from low income brackets live in Sultanganj union that includes Kamrangirchar, the most densely populated DMP area.

Residents of Kamrangirchar said most of them are helpless in the wake of skyrocketing prices of food items. They have no alternative to trekking to the fair price outlets in the city corporation areas. Particularly, the women have to spend a major part of their time queuing up for rice at BDR and OMS outlets or direct sale points.

Shahinor Begum of Rasulbagh in Kamrangirchar said she goes to Azimpur staff quarters playground to buy rice twice a week since there is no BDR outlet in her area.

"I start for the BDR outlet at Azimpur at the crack of dawn and return home in the evening. I have to leave my three minor kids to a neighbour. I could have spent the time earning some money if the facilities were here in Kamrangirchar," she said.

Wahid Hossain, a former OMS dealer of Kamrangirchar, told The Daily Star, "I was an OMS dealer each time the governments in the last 10 years undertook the programme for Kamrangirchar area. But this year they did not give me a dealership."

The officials concerned told him that they would not appoint any

dealer for Kamrangirchar since the area is not under city corporation or upazila.

Monir Hossain, chairman of Sultanganj union parishad, told The Daily Star that Kamrangirchar, a five-square mile area flanked by Buriganga, is one of the poorest areas under DMP.

"Programmes like BDR fair price outlets or OMS is essential for those living here since most of them are needy and cannot afford to live in the DCC areas," he said.

Hamid Ali, who came to Azimpur from Dakshin Khan to buy rice from the direct sale outlet, said, "I have to spend almost the entire day for buying rice as there is no outlet in our area."

He said, "As buying rice occupies most of my time I cannot do other tasks. Many are forced to buy rice at a much higher price from the local shops."

Shahidul Islam, chairman of Sarulia union under Demra Police Station said, "Over 2 lakh people live in my village and most of them are from low income group. It should not matter if they are under union parishad or municipality as they are the ones deserving the benefits most."

The director general of the food directorate said currently two truckloads of rice are sold each day four days a week at Lalbagh and Mohammadpur embankment area near Kamrangirchar.

He said they will soon increase the number of trucks to sell rice in areas adjacent to the unions so that people from there could get the benefits.

Besides, he said, lately they have increased the number of rice trucks at Uttar Azimpur bearing in mind the convenience of residents of Uttar Khan and Dakshin Khan, he said.

Contacted, DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star that there are many problems including demarcation cases centring the unions and that is why they are yet to be brought under the city corporation.

"We are trying to bring those unions under DCC so that those people too can have the benefits on offer for city dwellers," he said.

PDB retains deal

FROM PAGE 1

power to the national grid during the summer and ease load shedding to some degrees.

Energy Prima was supposed to deposit \$3.06 million in bank guarantee for the Fenchuganj project back on February 7. But the company failed to do so despite reminders, and extension of time till March 24 as per the contract.

The contract did not allow time extension beyond March 24 unless both the PDB and Energy Prima had agreed on the matter. As there had been no such understanding, the PDB served the termination notice on March 30. However, on March 31, Energy Prima sent a letter saying that it would deposit the money by April 15.

"But this has no legal basis. Termination notice has been served as Energy Prima has violated all terms and conditions of the contract," said a PDB source.

But an influential quarter is learnt to have mounted pressure on the PDB not to enforce the termination notice nor go for a re-tender of the rental power project.

Instead, the PDB was asked to accept Energy Prima's bank guarantee of \$3.06 million submitted on Wednesday with the date mentioned as April 15. The guarantee is valid till June 4.

After bagging deals from the government in mid-January, Energy Prima has been using various pretexts to get extension of commercial operation dates (COD) of the three other rental projects -- Kumargaon 50 MW, Shahjibazar 50 MW and Bogra 20 MW power plants.

At first, on January 31, Energy Prima deposited bank guarantees for Kumargaon and Shahjibazar projects in Bangladesh taka,

instead of dollars-- as required by the contract. The PDB on February 24 asked the company to deposit this guarantee in dollars.

On February 9, Energy Prima asked the PDB to extend the time for COD arguing that the project sites were not prepared for installation of machinery. The PDB however replied that as per the contract, the COD has to be 120 days after the contract execution date, and there is no scope for allowing extra time. These three projects are supposed to begin operation on May 16.

Hosaf is owned by Moazzem Hossain, one of the main accused in a case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission last month. Moazzem is the brother of Mosharrat Hossain, who was a BNP parliamentarian from Feni. Moazzem had received unusual favour from autocratic ruler HM Ershad regarding Raozan power project, then from the first Khaleda Zia government for Barapukuria coal mine project and finally from the second Khaleda Zia government for Barapukuria coal mine and power projects.

Moazzem is accused of corruption involving contracts for Barapukuria coal mine but he was tipped to flee the country a week before the ACC filed the case.

Energy Prima and Hosaf Meter are both owned by Moazzem Hossain. Energy Prima has been shown as 'Local Agent' without explaining whom it represents and how it is linked to power sector.

The Power Cell floated the rental power bids in October last year, drawing 13 offers from five companies for seven locations. On November 19, the cell floated another tender to draw offer for the eighth location and received two more such offers.

Storm

FROM PAGE 1

Thursday. A cow also died at the time.

Our Kurigram correspondent reports: A nor'wester caused widespread devastation in the district Thursday evening, damaging four educational institutions and hundreds of houses. Boro and maize crops were partially damaged in five upazilas during the storms.

The howling winds caused injury to ten people. While visiting Pramanikarti, Goalervita and Shibrum villages of Kanthalbari union under Sadar upazila, our correspondent saw about 250 damaged houses. About 150 houses of Holokhana union under Sadar upazila were razed to the ground.

More than 200 houses in Morakata, Char Kurigram and Velakopa villages, in Sweeper Colony, Munshipara, Mollapara, Old Post Office Para and Old Railway Station Para areas and along the Dharla river embankment in Kurigram municipality were destroyed.

About 350 houses in Bokumar, Baragram, Kesamay, Chenai, Mohedhar and Ramratan villages under Chenai union in Rajarhat upazila were damaged. A man at Chenai was also injured.

About 300 houses in Shimulbari, Kashipur and Naodanga villages under Phulbari upazila were fully or partially damaged.

Besides, about 600 houses, 450 acres of maize and 50 acres of Boro fields were damaged at Shoulmari, Bandabar and Dantvanga unions under Roummari upazila.

Apart from houses, hundreds of trees were uprooted in the nor'wester-hit areas.

UNB reports: A nor'wester lashed six unions in Sirajganj's Shajadpur upazila, leaving three people slightly injured and damaging over 100 thatched houses Thursday night.

The 20-minute storm at 9:30pm also damaged Boro crop, uprooted many trees and electric poles, disrupting power supply in the areas.

Forged visas

FROM PAGE 1

special symbols and stay in the transit, and not to cross immigration section after their arrival in Dubai, said the task force member.

Members of the racket identify the jobseekers with special symbols like caps and then transport them by Iraq-bound aircraft from the transit, he mentioned.

Khalilur Rahman of Narsingdi, who recently returned home from a Kurdish district of Iraq, told this correspondent that several thousand Bangladeshis are there, living a subsistence life.

He said he paid Tk 1.9 lakh to two manpower brokers in Narsingdi-- Humayun Kabir and Nadira-- who managed his travel to Iraq via Dubai on January 29 this year.

"I managed a job of only Tk 6,000 a month but many others were unemployed. They go half-fed or unfed," Khalilur Rahman said.

Meanwhile, recruiting agencies said once the workers with photocopy visas arrive at the UAE immigration, officials verify the visas on their computer network. The workers are not allowed to enter the UAE if the visas are not found on the computer network.

"But misunderstandings at the UAE immigration often result in deportation of many workers," said a recruiting agent.

Immigration officials in Dhaka said such deportation and return of Bangladeshis from Dubai are frequent. So, they have asked the government not to allow Bangladeshis to go to the UAE with photocopy visas but steps in this regard are yet to be taken.

The taskforce member said they would recommend taking up the issue of photocopy visas with the UAE authorities.

BMET Director General Abdul Malek however said there might be some cases of fraudulent practices concerning photocopy visas but the number is not that high.

Suicide blast kill 25 Afghans

Dutch commander's son slain

AFP, Kabul

The son of the Netherlands' new military chief was among two Dutch Nato soldiers slain on Friday by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan, a day after a suicide blast killed 25 Afghans.

Two other soldiers were injured in the incident that killed Dennis van Uhm, the son of General Peter van Uhm, who was named top commander of the Dutch armed forces on Thursday.

The hardline Taliban movement had threatened to step up attacks against Dutch forces in Afghanistan if a far-right Dutch lawmaker broadcast his anti-Islam film, which was aired last month.

"We remain determined to do what is expected of us -- united," Defence Minister Eimert van Middelkoop said at a press conference in The Hague.

The four soldiers were returning from a reconnaissance mission when the bomb blast hit their vehicle in the troubled southern province of Uruzgan, Dutch defence ministry spokesman General Freek Meulman said.

The two killed were 23 and 22 years old, said Meulman. Among the two injured, aged 20 and 25, one is in critical condition while the other is stable.

Uruzgan police chief Juma Gul Hemat said the incident occurred near Tirin Kot, the provincial capital. "It was a roadside bomb blast which hit the Dutch soldiers. Two soldiers were killed," he told AFP.

More than 1,600 Dutch soldiers are currently deployed in Afghanistan as part of the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), which is fighting a stepped-up insurgency by the Taliban.

The Dutch government decided in November to extend the mission until late 2010.

Sixteen Dutch soldiers have been killed in the country, either in accidents or combat.

The latest casualties brought to 44 the number of foreign soldiers killed

Adventure

FROM PAGE 16

at Khairul who was on duty in front of Police Staff College at Mirpur Section-13 at around 8:45pm. As the constable resisted the attempt, the lad wearing police uniform stabbed him in the back with a knife.

During interrogation Nayeem said he had bought the uniform from Polwell Market in the city.

Tripura minister

FROM PAGE 16

and arms trafficking.

West Bengal police traced the whereabouts of Mamun after a pen drive was seized from two Bangladeshis in the state's Howrah district on January 15 this year.

West Bengal police said Mamun was a resident of Dhaka involved in arms smuggling and was illegally staying in Tripura and also managed to secure a passport from the state.

2 school girls

FROM PAGE 16

Act with Ramna Police Station in the early hours yesterday.

He charged six youths--Shariful Islam, Monir Hossain, Rifat, Mizan, Alok and Sourav with kidnapping. All the accused are aged around 20.

Sources said Hasem, now settled in Narayanjan, knows the arrestees since the time he and his family used to live in the capital's