

Coal, new gas

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year, when it crossed \$100 a barrel for the first time. It now seems unbelievable that even in 1995-96 oil price hovered around \$12 to 15 a barrel.

According to experts in Petrobangla, the BPC and oil companies, the government should prepare to face the inevitable. It should not waste time in taking steps to better utilise its condensate resources—which is a by-product of natural gas—to produce both petroleum and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

The government should also prioritise exploration of new gas resources and take legal steps for withdrawal of a court injunction on on-shore oil and gas exploration. Both Bapex and foreign oil companies should be encouraged to go for exploration and drilling of well for new gas resources.

In addition, the government should not further delay taking decisions on utilising the under utilised coal resources that appear to promise energy security of the country.

"Asia Energy's activities cannot be the reason for which the government is sitting on approving the coal policy. If the Asia Energy deal was made wrongfully, it should be cancelled, and we should move ahead. If there was no wrong-doing, then also we should go ahead," said a Petrobangla official.

The country needs to reduce overall energy consumption by discouraging wastage of gas in domestic and commercial sectors. At the same time, compressed natural gas (CNG) network for the country's transport sector should also be expanded so that when oil price hits \$200 a barrel, this sector does not bog down, officials said.

"Bangladesh will have to think radically how to meet its energy demands," says an executive of an oil company. "Like many other countries, we should be pro-active. Most European countries are not leaning to alternative and renewable energy resources like wind and solar power, and the government is subsidising those sectors to help them grow. We should also utilise renewable energy resources on a largescale."

He said that following India, Bangladesh should also go for plantation of Jatropa trees in fallow lands. Jatropa is a regional species, which is the source of bio-diesel. India meets 15 to 20 percent of its diesel demands from Jatropa.

High oil price has already done a lot of damage to the BPC. Its reputation has become so shaky that banks ask for three percent as confirmation charge on the value of oil of credit (LC) against any oil import deal. This situation will worsen in the coming months.

"First, let us be clear about this -- there should not be any subsidy on any form of energy other than diesel. Again, subsidy on diesel should be offered only to farmers for farming, and public transports. To fix this subsidy, the government should analyse the previous data on consumption of diesel by farmers and public transports," said a BPC official.

"The government should launch an awareness campaign about the oil price situation, and the reality around the world. This awareness is required because the market price of petroleum products should now be totally opened. What is inevitable should be faced bravely. We have to increase oil prices in pace with the import price," he added.

BETTER UTILISATION OF CONDENSATE THROUGH NGL FRACTIONATION

When oil prices will sky rocket further, price of LPG --used for cooking in many areas of the country -- will be higher. This is why the government should utilise the country's condensate resources by installing NGL fractionation plant. Bangladesh produces more than 300,000 tonnes of condensate (6,768 barrels a day). By fractionating the condensate, it is possible to produce 80,000 tonnes of LPG, and the remaining can be used to make petroleum products.

Of the total condensate production, the Eastern Refinery now uses 1,30,000 tonnes to mix with crude oil and another 70,000 tonnes to fractionate and produce LPG. The old Kailastula fractionation plant also produces PG from condensate. A private firm named Super Refinery in Chittagong purchases 600 barrels per day for producing diesel and other petroleum products by wasting propane and butane of condensate.

The government had taken move to install four NGL fractionation plants many years back. During the four-party alliance rule, when the tender was floated, all big wigs of BNP wanted the four contracts despite their lack of qualification for the project. Their pressure ultimately produced nothing, except awarding of one contract secretly to Bashundhara group. But that bid also failed after the change of government.

Sources said that after sitting on the matter for two years, the energy ministry has recently formed a committee to spearhead the fractionation projects.

NAPHTA PROCESSING
In 2007, the government signed a contract with Bangladesh-US joint venture Mobil Jamuna Fuel Company (MJFC) to set up a naphtha processing plant in Chittagong, which will produce octane from naphtha from 2009 at an investment of Tk350 crore.

This will help the oil importing country to save its foreign exchange for import of 1,20,000 tonnes of

refined octane worth Tk 450 crore (at \$100 a barrel) a year to meet the entire local demand. It will also help best utilise naphtha, produced while refining imported crude oil in Eastern Refinery. The refinery produces around 1,50,000 tonnes of naphtha while processing 14 lakh tonnes of crude oil. Since there is no domestic demand for naphtha, the refinery sells it out to international buyers.

Sources said that the MJFC has acquired land for the project and it is hoped that this project will be completed as per schedule.

OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION
Despite repeated promises by successive governments, Bapex never received any shot in the arm to conduct oil and gas exploration activities. The current energy scenario demands putting all out efforts to discover and develop new oil and gas resources.

"The government should award all the marginal gas fields to Bapex to re-ventilate and re-explore. Bapex can hire high end oil companies for data collection, and even drill wells," said an energy ministry official.

A Petrobangla official pointed out that the government should take quick decisions about both off-shore and on-shore gas exploration.

"Chevron has enjoyed a five year moratorium on Block-7 after signing a production sharing contract for the block seven years ago. After five years, it has conducted seismic survey. Now, it seeks extension of the contract for further survey. We should not entertain this kind of planning. Instead, we should ask Chevron to go for drilling in the next phase," he said, adding that Block-7 apparently offers large promises.

A Chevron official on the other hand said the 1,000 km line survey detected three potential hydrocarbon zones. For better understanding, Chevron wants further survey so that the future drilling programme is highly successful.

"Gas resources are depleting fast. We have to invest enough to see if we have more gas resources, we should not give up. Norway made a big breakthrough after many frustrating attempts," said another Petrobangla official.

COAL RESOURCES
There are five coal zones promising high quality proven coal reserve of 2,357 million tonnes (MT). Probable reserve in these five locations alone stands at 3,258 MT. If all of this coal is converted into power, it could generate 5,000 megawatts of power for up to 66 to 90 years. Sixteen million MT of coal can generate 5,000 MW power for one year.

The coal issue however became controversial due to the Asia Energy deal for Phulbari coal mine from 2005. To resolve this problem, besides addressing other issues, a coal policy has been debated, drafted, finalised and re-finalised but it is yet to be adopted.

"In the context of ensuring energy security, we believe that the government must take some major decisions on using the coal zones," said a top Petrobangla official. Mentioning that Barapukuria underground coal mine is already operating and Jamalgonj coal basin is too deep, he suggested that the government take decision on the other three coal zones-- Phulbari, Khalaspir and Dighipara.

Of these three, data and plan on Phulbari have been detailed out by Asia Energy.

"If Asia Energy does not qualify for Phulbari mine, let there be open tender through which competent companies may take up the project. The government has already taken a decision on Dighipara zone but it will take some time to plan it Dighipara because there has not been any study on it yet," the official said.

"Khalaspir zone also needs detailed studies before a plan can be chalked out about it," he added.

Regarding the underground Barapukuria mine which aims at producing only 21 MT of coal in 30 years from a reserve of 389 MT, he said it is possible to increase the mine's production by investing a little more. The mine is now producing about 8,00,000 MT a year, most of which is supposed to be consumed by a 250 MW power plant. "If we can increase coal production to nine lakh tonnes a year, we can feed coal for another 125 MW power plant," he added.

"But given the country's situation, producing coal for a mere 125 MW plant is nothing. We need to produce coal in bulk for our power and other energy needs," the official said.

Technologies are available to produce synthetic petroleum from coal at a cost of around \$30 a tonne.

Amini

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with hockey sticks, iron rods and blades, threatened him with life.

He said he later got admitted to Mitford Hospital from where doctors referred him to Orthopaedic Hospital, adding that goons hired by Amini also tried to kidnap him from the hospital.

Amini, however, brushed aside the charges, alleging that the plaintiff suffered injuries while making off with a madrasa teacher's cellphone. He said a theft case has already been laid against Sharif with Lalbagh Police Station.

He said his opponents are using Sharif following disputes over the ownership of the madrasa land.

Officer-in-charge of Lalbagh Police Station said investigations into the two cases are underway.

Official car

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When Nowfel asked PGCL to pay the second instalment of the premium, the company came to know about the "mistaken" registration and declined to pay the sum, saying the matter should be corrected first.

A few days later, a fire broke out in the company's garage, burning the microbus, a motorcycle and a jeep.

Later, when the PGCL claimed insurance money the insurance company refused to pay it saying the vehicle was damaged under the security measures and in the garage of PGCL.

PGCL Managing Director Saiful Islam Chowdhury admitted that there are allegations that the matter of registration was suppressed. The probe committee has also been asked to find out the cause of the fire, he added.

Meanwhile, it is alleged that to suppress the incident Nowfel gave the then PGCL general manager Khandaker Nazmul Haque a vehicle of the organisation for the latter's personal use in Dhaka. He also allegedly kept a fake logbook to hide the private use of the vehicle and purchase fuel worth Tk6 lakh for it.

Sources said the column for name and designation of the user of the vehicle was not filled in properly in the logbook and names of places like Dhaka, Bogra, Sirajganj, Nalka and DOHS were mentioned instead.

Even after keeping such a fake logbook, the former PGCL general manager had to pay Tk 86,000 at the time of retirement to adjust the expenditures.

It is also alleged that there is no trace of huge crockery worth Tk 12 lakh of the PGCL guesthouse and Nowfel was in its charge.

CA calls

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function chaired by Secretary of the CA's office Kazi M Aminul Islam.

The CA distributed crests and certificates among the best seven Special Olympics award winners.

He said the glorious success in the country's sports history brought by the sportsmen and women in the Special Olympics has overwhelmed all.

The CA also appreciated the efforts of the family members of the mentally challenged sportsmen and women as well as their trainers, organisers and organisations concerned in helping them attain the global standard.

Referring to various government steps taken for the welfare of the physically and mentally challenged, Fakhruddin said the government is always ready and will remain so in the future to do whatever necessary for their welfare despite the country's resource constraint.

The CA said he will ask the ministry concerned to provide playgrounds exclusively for the retarded sportsmen and women.

He thanked Gramephone, the country's leading cellphone operator, for extending financial and other supports to the Bangladesh team that participated in the Shanghai Special Olympic Games.

The participants in the Shanghai Special Olympic Games, sport organisers and sport personalities were also present at the function.

SC to publish

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brief descriptions of judicial service commission and judicial service pay commission.

Most of the highest court authorities all over the world publish detailed annual reports, the sources added.

Lawyers of the SC congratulated the authorities for taking the initiative to publish the annual report of the SC.

Barrister Rafique-Ul Huq, a senior SC lawyer, yesterday told The Daily Star that once the SC report is published, people including lawyers and judges will be able to have an overview of the functions and activities of the judiciary.

Barrister Shafigue Ahmed, president of Supreme Court Bar Association, said the SC move to publish the report is undoubtedly a praiseworthy effort as it will help ensure transparency and speed in the judicial system, provided that the information and data about judges, vacant posts, pending cases and activities of the judiciary published in the report are correct.

The annual report of the SC will be published in a ceremony where Chief Justice Md Ruhul Amin will be the chief guest and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Adviser AF Hasan Arif will be the special guest.

Judges of both Appellate and High Court Divisions of the SC, judges of subordinate courts and diplomats will also attend the programme.

Ikhtad Ahmed, registrar at the SC, said the report will be published with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under its good governance programme.

The SC intends to continue publishing its annual reports every year from now on, he added.

China fights

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thousands of buildings toppled or in danger of collapse.

Since the quake, the most pressing priority has been to rescue those trapped amid the mass of twisted metal and concrete. Six more people, including a German tourist, were pulled out of the rubble on Saturday.

After 124 hours, a 31-year-old woman was rescued from the rubble of a building in Deyang city, while around the same time a 33-year-old worker was hauled out of a phosphorous mine in Shifang city, Xinhuo news agency reported.

A third man was also saved during the same time. The three were the people known to have survived the longest in the debris since Monday's quake.

Gatco case

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in the immediate past BNP-led coalition government, said he had no involvement in any corruption. "My only offence is I was a member of the purchase committee. I have no other offence."

Last Thursday, a metropolitan court issued arrest warrants against 12 'absconding accused', including Nizami and four other cabinet ministers of the four-party alliance government, in the Gatco scam case.

Nizami said his name was not in the FIR but later he was included. "What is most painful is I was shown absconding in a disgusting way. This is a blatant falsehood, which does not suit the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC)."

He noted that corruption originates in falsehood. "If the ACC takes recourse to falsehood to arrange a case against a person, how the corruption could be curbed by such an institution. Rather, it becomes an instrument of repressing politicians, which is damaging for the ACC," he said.

Nizami said none could raise the allegation of corruption or irregularity during his 20 months as agriculture minister and 40 months as industries minister. A corrupt person cannot run a ministry so transparently. Even such charge came 16 months into the state of emergency.

He said different agencies and media tried to detect irregularities by looking through microscope but they failed. Similarly, there is no evidence of corruption against Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed who was the social welfare minister.

Asked when he plans to go to court, Nizami said he will act on advice of his lawyers.

Asked whether Jamaat would go for movement alone or with other

parties if he was arrested, Mizami said all past movements were launched unitedly whenever an unelected government was imposed on the nation blocking the road to democracy and people's voting right.

Asked about Jamaat's stance on the government-proposed dialogue, Nizami said there is no instance from the government to create an enabling environment to make the dialogue fruitful through participation of all parties.

Rather, he alleged, the government, having failed to realise the present political reality, is taking steps to spoil the pre-dialogue atmosphere.

"Our party view is that this government is backed by the army. Army is the symbol of the nation's independence and sovereignty. Failure of this government will have far-reaching effect."

Nizami said, "We apprehend a national disaster if there be any deviation from holding credible elections according to the roadmap and handing over power to elected representatives."

The Jamaat chief said, "It is no one's expectation that the army-backed government should face off the people. But it seems that the government is pushing the country towards that end."

Nizami said the only responsibility of the caretaker government is to hold a credible election to parliament with the participation of all political parties.

By realising the reality, he said, the government should release all political leaders, including the two top leaders-- Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina.

He said the government must refrain from arresting politicians afresh. Otherwise, it would not be possible to hold an election participated by all.

AL, BNP yet to get

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Nazrul Islam Khan also said last night that the letter did not reach them as of 8:00pm.

When contacted over telephone Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman declined to make any comment on the parties' not receiving the government letter for the dialogue.

Meanwhile, the dialogue itself seems to be in trouble because of what some politicians termed the "preconditions" set by the government and the leadership crises in the political parties.

The policymakers of both the AL and BNP are in serious dilemma over taking part in the dialogue with or without their party chiefs. Unlike other invited parties, they are facing difficulties in working out strategies for the dialogue with the government-led by the chief adviser.

Dozens of major political figures, including AL President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, have been put in jails while a few more senior leaders may soon follow them. Many others are on the run to avoid arrest. All these have caused a vacuum in the parties' leadership.

Party insiders said their leaders are busier trying to survive the government's anti-corruption drives than doing politics--a situation that, they fear, would continue to thwart the dialogue.

The parties have been saying they would not participate in any dialogue with the government if conditions were imposed. They want to sit in the dialogue to discuss openly which, they say, is only possible if the government shifts from its present stance.

The letters sent to six political parties on Tuesday said, "The chief adviser's address to the nation will give directives about the agenda of the dialogue." This also caused concerns among the major political parties.

"How can the chief adviser's address be the agenda of the dialogue when it disappointed most political parties?" said a senior AL leader, who was doubtful about the success of the dialogue if it takes place.

It seems that the government will not shift from its position, a few political leaders speculated.

Sources said parties invited to the talks would be busy holding leaders in the next couple of days to decide whether to participate in the dialogue.

Many, however, believe that the dialogue will be successful to bring an end to the ongoing crisis.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami and the pro-Khaleda faction of BNP have demanded release of both Hasina and Khaleda as a precondition for the dialogue. The AL is also pressing for Hasina's release and her presence at the dialogue.

There are also pressures on the AL from its leaders and supporters for not participating in the dialogue

Power plant case

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the case with Tejjagon Police Station, accusing Hasina and six others of helping a foreign company and its local partners win a deal for setting up three 100-MW barge-mounted power plants at Haripur, Khulna and Shiklabaha, depriving the lowest bidder.

The co-accused are former energy secretary Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former Power Development Board (PDB) chairman Noor Uddin Mahmud Kamal, Managing Director of Summit Industries and Mercantile Corporation Private Ltd Aziz Khan, its Director Farid Khan, United Group Chairman Hasan Mahmud Rajia and its Director Abul Kalam Azad.

RU students ransack provost's office

RU CORRESPONDENT

Several hundreds students of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman hall of Rajshahi University ransacked the hall provost Jahangir Kabir's office late Friday night and set fire on furniture, demanding Kabir's removal from office.

The agitating students claimed the provost had been ignoring their demands for improvement of hall facilities for long.

Meanwhile residential students, at a press briefing yesterday, threatened to go for a tougher movement against the hall provost if their demands were not met within two days.

Residential students allege that they have on several occasions informed the hall provost about problems at the hall, including issues regarding dining facilities, quality of food, TV room and poor lighting at the hall.

The hall provost always assured the students of looking into the matter but this never happened, students allege.

Campus sources said a student called Salim Mia talked to the hall provost Kabir and informed him about these problems over a mobile phone on Friday night.

Salim later claimed to the media that in response to his complaints, Kabir scolded him for disturbing the provost at night and threatened to cancel Salim's residential seat in the hall.

Salim informed other students of the provost's threats and they brought out a procession at around 11:30 pm demanding the hall provost's removal.

Gatco graft case

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former chief finance and accounts officer Ahmed Abul Qasem, former CPA chairman Commodore (ret'd) Zulfiqar Ali, former CPA chairman AMM Shahadat Hossain, former CPA directors AM Sanwar Hossain, Luthful Kabir, Gatco managing director (MD) Syed Galib Ahmed, Gatco director Syed Tanvir Ahmed, and Akbar's son Ismail Hossain Simon are behind bars while the rest were shown absconding.

The other fugitive accused are former shipping secretary Zulfiqar Haider Chowdhury, Gatco directors AKM Musa Kajol, Ehsan Yusuf, Shahjahan M Hasib, former member of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) AK Rashid Uddin Ahmed and former shipping minister and late BNP leader Col (ret'd) Akbar Hossain's wife Jahannara Ansar.

Sources said arrest warrants for BNP leaders Saifur, Bhuiyan, Shamsul Islam and Amir Khasru and Gatco official Musa Kajol were dispatched to Gulshan Police Station while those for Nizami, MK Anwar, Ehsan, Zulfiqar, Jahannara, Rashiduddin and Hasib were sent to Ramna, New Market, Khilgaon, Kafur, Dhanmondi and Uttara police stations.

Saifur, who is also the top leader of the pro-former BNP faction, is in Singapore now for treatment. Amir Khasru left the country immediately after the army-led joint forces launched the crackdown on corruption suspects.

Clarification

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percent skilled and semi-skilled workers out of total demand for recruitment abroad, said the clarification issued on May 13.

It said the government has also taken a number of initiatives to provide skill development and technical training in various trades. Twenty-three trades have already been identified as the potential trades in the overseas employment market on the basis of the reports from various missions abroad.

A training centre under Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) is being converted into a centre of excellence to provide international standard training under Korean technical assistance.

The ministry has also taken initiatives to upgrade the curriculum of different training courses to cope it with international standard. BMET has also increased the number of technical training centres from 12 to 38 during last five years.

Storm kills

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Meanwhile, our Benapole correspondent reported that at least 20 people were injured and 40 houses were damaged in a storm that lashed Sharsha upazila yesterday afternoon.

Crops on vast tracts of land were also damaged in the storm.

Import scandal

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of corruption and inefficiency, crippling honest businesses, holding back the economy and depriving the government of thousands of crore taka a year. This was no small time scam, but a criminal empire involving businessmen, government officials and the National Board of Revenue, that were supposed to spot the wrongdoing.

In a four part series staring tomorrow, The Daily Star reveals the extent of the rampant criminality and corruption that has plagued the import trade and still costs the country dearly.

AL to discuss

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Talking to reporters there, Amu said they would decide in consultation with members of the 14-party combine and on getting Hasina's nod whether to sit with the government.

Except AL, the parties in the alliance however have already decided to participate in the formal dialogue with the government, said sources close to them.

While AL wants to ensure its detained chief's presence at the dialogue, its allies are not in favour of setting Hasina's release as a condition for their participation in the talks with the caretaker administration. They believe the issue is an internal matter of the party.

Besides, leaders of the 14-party components are reluctant to go for any movement at this time, whereas AL plans to launch a united movement to force the government to free Hasina before the dialogue.

They however said they look forward to having a unified stance on issues like announcement of electoral schedule, lifting of the state of emergency and trial of war criminals.

But for this, they believe, they would have to ensure coordination within the combine for lack of which ties between AL and the others have already loosened.

In the last few months, relations between AL and Gono Forum of Dr Kamal Hossain have reached the lowest level.

Hasina has criticised Dr Kamal on a number of occasions for what she said was his pro-government stance. AL acting president Zillur Rahman has said they do not consider Gono Forum as their ally anymore.

Dr Kamal, on the other hand, has taken a swipe at Hasina and others for what he said were their "misdeeds" in the past.

Insiders said AL still attaches great importance to its relations with the rest of the combine. It seeks to bridge the gap with them. At the same time, it wants to work in unison with the other like-minded parties including Communist Party of Bangladesh and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh.

Tofail Ahmed has been assigned to communicate with the parties and lay the groundwork for the talks beginning tomorrow at Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, leaders of the 14-party said AL used to take decisions in consultation with them before the state of emergency was promulgated on January 11 last year. But now it takes decisions unilaterally.

"Workers' Party General Secretary Bimal Biswas said, "Definitely, Awami League will have to take the initiative in minimising its gap with others in the alliance."

Ganotantri Party President Nurul Islam observed that AL's mistakes in giving nomination for the stalled parliamentary election have in fact led to its present distance with others.

"There is still time to be united again on national issues," he told The Daily Star.

About the demand for Hasina's release and presence in the dialogue, Jatuya Samajtantrik Dal General Secretary Syed Zafar Sazzad said it's their demand and they would have to press it home. The combine will seek to implement only the decisions taken by it.

"We have already decided to sit for the dialogue with the government where election, withdrawal of the state of emergency and trial of

war criminals will top our agenda," he told The Daily Star.

HOME COMING DAY
Hundreds of party activists and supporters waited for hours in a queue stretched up to Asad Gate to hand flowers and sweets to the jail authorities for the AL president.

On behalf of the AL central committee, presidium member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and acting general secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam handed a bouquet shaped like a boat, the party's election symbol, to the jail authorities for Hasina.

Motia Chowdhury, Mukul Bose, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Akhtaruzzaman, Abdur Rahman, Major Gen (ret'd) Subid Ali Bhuiyan, Sahara Khatun, Abdul Mannan Khan, Nurul Islam Nahid, Habibur Rahman Siraj, Dr Abdur Razzak, Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan, Capt (ret'd) ABM Tajul Islam, Yafes Osman, Dipu Moni, Abu Sayeed and Abdul Latif Siddiqui, among others, were present at that time.

A huge number of law enforcers were deployed in and around the Jatuya Sangsad Bhaban to ward off anything untoward.

Barricades put up on different roads leading to the sub-jail were removed after 11:00am, allowing the AL leaders to gather at