

Better power sector

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The good news for the new government is that there are some power projects in the pipeline. In this month three small and three rental power projects totalling 168 MW capacity would go online.

Next month, another 131 MW would be added by three small plants and two rental plants. Besides, two small, two rental plants and the Siddhirganj 105 MW peaking power plant unit-1 would add another 287 MW in March. In May the unit 2 of the Siddhirganj peaking plant would add another 105 MW and in June a 50 MW Sikabaha plant would be added.

"We have found out that outside interference had severely destroyed working spirit in PDB and other power related bodies," says a top power ministry source.

Since 2001, PDB or the power generating bodies could not make technical decisions as the ministry or even higher authorities were imposing those.

"Officials were not being naturally promoted to higher ranks. All the power related organisations were being headed by the power secretary himself. This is unhealthy. You cannot expect performance from PDB or REB when others are making their decisions," says the source.

"No matter how weak an organisation is, outsiders should not make their decision. Under the caretaker government, we stopped that practice. The power secretary no longer heads all the power related organisations. The power units no longer wait for the power ministry instructions. They make their own decisions and inform the ministry," heads.

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), which was created in 2003 under donor pressure but kept inactive, has also been empowered by the caretaker government.

Instead of the power ministry, BERC now decides on power tariff and issuance of power generation licences.

In addition, the caretaker government has approved two vital policies -- Renewable Energy Policy of Bangladesh and Policy Guidelines for Enhancement of Private Participation in the Power Sector, 2008.

Both of these would stimulate wider participation of the private sector.

Meanwhile, the global oil and steel prices are rapidly falling. In addition, power project procurement and engineering construction cost is also declining. For instance, in India Bhel is constructing a 740 MW power project at a cost of \$550 million and in the US, Shaw is building a 500 MW plant for \$400 million.

In contrast, the recently rejected Bibiyana power project proposal by the Korean-Malaysian Powertek consortium would cost \$465 million for 450 MW.

Chief of Summit Group Aziz Khan says: "Today it is more possible for Bangladesh to improve its infrastructure including electricity as the cost of equipment, availability of equipment and the cost of capital, i.e. interest rates in the world market are very low."

He adds: "As for financing, Bangladesh has been financed by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, they are now being pursued by their member countries to give loans to create demand."

"Also the export credit agencies of the developed countries like the United States Export Import Bank have been advised by their governments to provide credit to the tune of \$200 billion within two years."

"I also expect credit from manufacturers to credit worthy projects as they have to sell their produce which has doubled in last three years."

Hasina acquitted

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Metropolitan Magistrate's court.

Farooq had filed the extortion case with Tejgaon PS on April 10 last year under the non-bailable sections of the Penal Code but withdrew it on December 23.

In the case, Farooq alleged that the former prime minister had forced him to pay her Tk 3 crore when she was the prime minister in 1998. He also brought the allegations of extortion and abuse of power against her at that time.

At a press conference, Farooq said, "Because of some misunderstanding in early 2007, I had to file the case against Sheikh Hasina, daughter of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The incident was undesired and unexpected form."

He submitted an application to the Tejgaon Police Station OC, requesting him to take necessary steps to withdraw the case, which is now under investigation.

Ramna blasts

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who had earlier been arrested and now in jail custody.

The five others are Arif Hasan Suman alias Abdur Razzak, Maulana Akbar Hossain alias Helaluddin, Shahadat Ullah alias Jewel, Maulana Abu Taher and Maulana Abdur Rauf.

At present the murder case is pending with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court of Dhaka.

The bloodbath that took place during Pahela Baishakh celebrations on April 14, 2001 left 10 people dead and scores injured.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Inspector Abu Hena Mohammad Yusuf, also the investigation officer (IO) of the cases, submitted the charge sheet to the CMM's Court of Dhaka on November 29 last year.

The IO included names of Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and 13 others in the charge sheets of the cases for committing the offences.

The other accused former deputy minister Abdul Salam Pintu's brother Maulana Mohammad Tajuddin, Maulana Abdul Hannan Sabbir, Maulana Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid, Hafez Jahangir Alam Badar, Maulana Abu Bakar alias Selim Hawlader, Mufti Shafiqur Rahman, Maulana Yahiya and Mufti Abdul Hye have been on the run since the cases were filed against them.

The court had earlier issued arrest warrants against them and an order to attach their properties.

During the investigation of the cases, Hannan, Akbar and Suman gave confessional statements to the magistrates at different times.

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Noakhali-1

FROM PAGE 16
order after hearing an appeal filed by Khandaker Ruhul Amin, an independent parliamentary candidate.

Following Ibrahim's writ petition that challenged the EC's decision of cancelling his candidature, the HC vacation bench on December 30 last year directed the commission to accept Ibrahim as a valid nominee of Awami League.

Ruhul Amin yesterday filed the appeal with the bench of the chamber judge to stay the HC order.

HM Ibrahim, an Awami League leader, earlier filed nomination as an independent candidate for contesting from Noakhali-1 constituency.

But he withdrew his candidature after the grand alliance nominated Nurul Islam in the constituency.

Nurul Islam died on December 4 last year. Later, Ibrahim submitted a fresh nomination paper getting Awami League ticket.

The EC on December 14 rescheduled the polls to this constituency for January 12. The returning officer concerned accepted his nomination paper but the EC cancelled his candidature on grounds that he earlier withdrew his candidature.

Ibrahim filed a writ petition with the HC challenging the legality of the EC's decision.

Rizvi sued

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Station to submit a report after an investigation into the matter.

Rizvi's allegation was published in The Daily Jangor under "Digital Rigging in Election" on January 2.

The statements made by the accused were false, fabricated and concocted and it was intentionally done to undermine the reputation and image of the complainant in the society, Tipu said in his complaint.

Advocate Siddiqur Rahman moved the case on behalf of Tipu.

Dec 29 election

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Commission (EC), the delegation observed various stages of the voting process at 88 polling centres in all six divisions of the country.

Prior to Election Day, the APDP observers were briefed by representatives of the EC, major political parties and domestic monitoring groups.

Based upon their observations, the observers felt that all stakeholders would work together to bring about the next phase of democratic governance, in which all political parties have constructive roles to play.

The APDP observers, however, recommended better dissemination of information on the electoral process to voters and improvement of the process within the polling centre to reduce the length of queues by adopting a simple and standardised procedure.

The Bangladeshi people have been without an elected government for almost two years and the high voter turnout and enthusiasm of voters is an indication of a great desire by the people to participate in the selection of their representatives to the parliament and the formation of a new government, read the press release.

The observers thanked the EC and all election workers and the staff at the International Republican Institute for facilitating this election observation mission.

Secretariat ready

FROM PAGE 1
the people and government employees for their cooperation in discharging their duties.

There has been a mixed atmosphere at the Secretariat as ministers are expected to take over, once portfolios are distributed among them at the end of this week, ending the extended tenure of the unelected government.

The ministries were run by advisers and special assistants to the chief adviser since the BNP-led coalition government handed over power to a caretaker government after their tenure ended in October, 2006.

The whole Secretariat is wearing a new look as the ministry offices are being cleaned and decorated to welcome the new ministers.

Officials of the Secretariat bade farewell to Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman, LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal, Communication and Housing and Public Works Adviser Ghulam Quader and Law and Land Adviser AF Hassan Arif yesterday.

They thanked each other for their cooperation and hoped that the upcoming government and its ministers would be different from the past ones in terms of attitude and performance.

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"We almost completed our jobs and will depart soon but we want to leave the job in such a way that the new government can start smoothly," Zillur told reporters after meeting the business leaders.

He hoped that the new government would be strong as it would have to perform well to satisfy people's expectations and desires.

Asked about crucial tasks of the new government, he said, "They should take decisions, especially on the economic and market-related issues, in consultation with the people concerned."

Zillur, vocal for his campaign for qualitative change in politics and the governance, said the people are more confident and ambitious than before. "They will keep pressure on the new government to do better."

Meanwhile, the cabinet division kept cars and residences ready for the would-be cabinet members. "Some 50 cars and 27 residences are ready for the cabinet members," said Cabinet Secretary Abdul Aziz yesterday.

Activities at the Secretariat have almost come to a standstill as the advisers and special assistants are just signing pending files. They are expected to end tenure by attending tomorrow's oath-taking ceremony of the new cabinet at Bangabhaban, officials said.

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Indian minister

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"I presume they are state actors or state-assisted actors unless the contrary is proved," he said.

Chidambaram, who took charge of the interior ministry after his predecessor resigned in the wake of the attacks, said the assaults were too well-planned to have been carried out without state assistance.

"Somebody who is familiar with intelligence and commando operation has directed this operation. And that cannot entirely be a non-state actor," he said.

Chidambaram warned those behind the attacks that the "price they will pay if this is repeated will be an enormous price."

India has previously blamed "elements" in Pakistan for the assaults in late November, saying that the Islamist group Lashkar-e-Taiba trained and equipped the militants who stormed India's financial capital.

But the Pakistan government says that New Delhi has provided no proof of this involvement in the strikes.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi reiterated Sunday that Islamabad would not hand over any Pakistani nationals, noting the two sides did not have an extradition treaty.

He added that he believed cross-border relations had recently improved, in part due to the intervention of the United States, Russia and China.

"But the problem is still there. After all an incident has taken place and we have to get to the bottom of it," Qureshi told reporters in the central city of Multan.

Keeping up the pressure on Pakistan, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Saturday that he hoped Pakistan would show "better sense" and crack down on the militant groups blamed for the attacks.

Meanwhile, the top US diplomat for South Asia will visit Pakistan this week amid simmering tensions between Islamabad and India in the wake of the deadly Mumbai attacks, Pakistan's foreign minister said Sunday.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi told a press conference broadcast live from the central city of Multan that he would meet US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher on Monday.

"Richard Boucher is visiting Pakistan. I have a meeting set with him on Monday," Qureshi said, without disclosing details about the agenda for the meeting.

"He deals with South Asian affairs and he routinely visits Pakistan," the US embassy in Islamabad declined to comment.

Indian media reported that Boucher was also due in New Delhi, for talks likely to focus on tensions between India and Pakistan, and the ongoing investigation into the attacks on Mumbai, which left 172 people dead including