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Public procurement law to be amended

Says finance minister; seeks more time to improve power situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to bring fresh amendments to the Public Procurement Act, which was made to bring transparency in government expenditure under donors' pressure.

"Public Procurement Regulation (Now Public Procurement Act) is an impediment to implementation of government's development programmes including those in power sector... So, it would be revised," Finance Minister AMA Muhith said yesterday at a pre-budget discussion with Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF).

Muhith also said he approved yesterday a Tk 243-crore 'arrear' cash incentive in export sector as part of the bailout package to face the impact of global recession.

"We took a decision in this regard in the March 24 taskforce meeting, and today (Monday) we approved it. It shows that we tried to respond quickly to the problem," the finance minister said at the

discussion held at the NEC auditorium. The ERF members came up with various recommendations for the next fiscal year's budget.

In response, Muhith said, "Our most problematic sector is power. Development of non-farm sector is talked about much, but first we need power to attain development in any sector."

"Many poles are standing tall, but we are unable to supply power. I don't know when we make power available. Earlier, it was thought that (required) power supply could be ensured in three years. But now it is clear it is not possible. More time is needed."

He mentioned that the government would give more emphasis on increased investment in power sector.

Planning Commission officials present at the discussion said they have already sought opinion from different ministries on amending the PPR.

Meanwhile, the PPR was made in 2003 when the BNP-led four-party alliance was

in power to meet the WB condition for development credit support. Many of the then ministers and top government officials strongly opposed it.

Muhith said proper steps would be taken in the current boro season to ensure that farmers get fair price of their produce.

Turning to the impact of global meltdown, the minister said revenue collection in the current fiscal year may be Tk 400 crore less than the targeted Tk 54,500 crore. And implementation of the Tk 25,600 crore ADP may be 10 per cent less.

"The size of the next budget is estimated to be Tk 99,962 crore. In the revised budget, the figure may stand at Tk 95,000 crore to Tk 96,000 crore," Muhith said.

They are formulating the budget in light of their election manifesto, and would increase allocations for subsidies, social safety net and agriculture sector, he added.

The prime minister's Finance and Planning Adviser Moshirur Rahman said

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BDR CARNAGE Govt may ask for Interpol help in probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government might request Interpol's support in quizzing suspects of the Palkhona massacre who are now abroad, said Commerce Minister Faruk Khan yesterday.

He said the investigators are now questioning suspects and will interrogate more people at home and abroad.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

2 more bills passed in JS

Biman, Dhaka Power Co get legal shield

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament yesterday passed two bills giving Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd legal status for continuation of their functions after a month when they ran their activities without any legality.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Qawmi madrasas under watch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police headquarters have sent directives to all the district police chiefs to mount watch on Qawmi madrasas in the wake of the March 24 arms and ammo haul at a Bhola madrasa-cum-orphanage.

Sources at the police HQ say the directives were issued on March 28 asking the superintendents of police to watch activities of the Qawmi madrasas and other suspicious places.

"We have been asked to mount surveillance on the Qawmi madrasas to know whether any outsiders or even foreigners visit any institutions and whether any lessons or motivation on jihad is imparted there," says an SP seeking anonymity.

A police official in Bhola from the Rapid Action Battalion says they have already stepped up intelligence activities in all 115 Qawmi madrasas in the district.

The officers-in-charge (OCs) of a number of police stations outside the capital say they have already been instructed to enter any Qawmi madrasa if anything looks suspicious.

"Moreover, the authorities have also asked us to compel such madrasa authorities to demolish high boundary walls and barbed wire fences, if any," comments an OC.

Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad yesterday said they have issued directives to mount watch on Qawmi madrasas and other suspicious places.

He said the step has been taken to check whether the madrasas are really teaching or carrying out any fundamental or militant activities.

"There are some grey areas in Qawmi madrasas, since rules and regulations regarding their [Qawmi madrasas] syllabus and studies could not fully be implemented," the IGP has recently told a private satellite TV channel.

About the present state of militancy, Nur Mohammad said he

SEE PAGE 7 COL 8

TAKING POWER FROM SATTAR Ershad cleared of sedition charge

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday discharged former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad from a sedition case filed against him on charges of taking power from the then president Justice Abdus Sattar at gunpoint in March 1982.

Hasanul Haq Inu, general secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

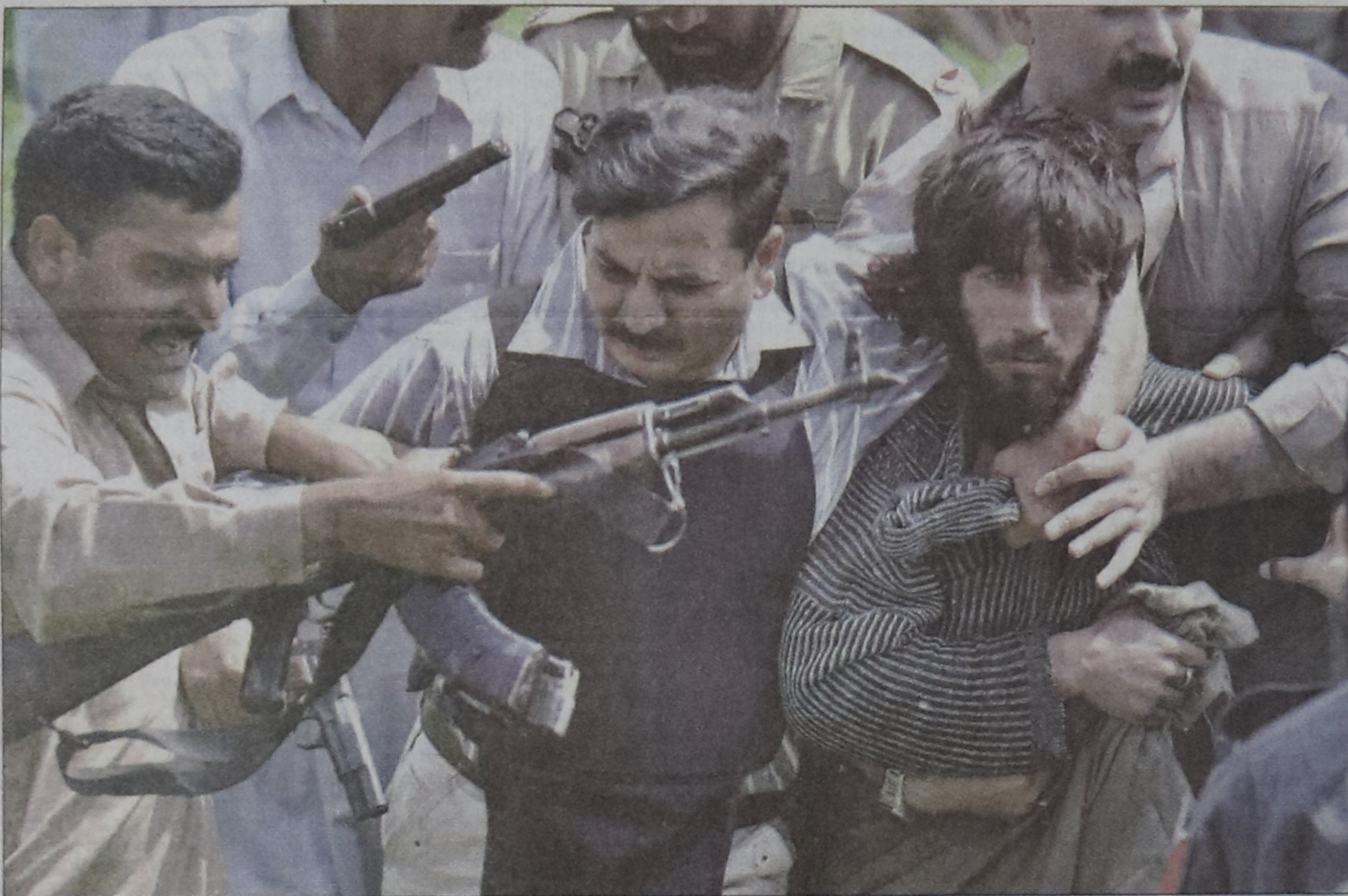
Gas supply rises in nat'l grid as spur line set up

UNB, Dhaka

Petrobangla and Chevron have successfully commissioned a spur pipeline at Jalalabad gas field, which is to raise the country's gas production by about 40 million cubic feet per day (mmcf).

Official said commissioning

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Pakistani security officials arrest a suspected militant, right, near the police training academy in Lahore yesterday during the attack that killed 12 people.

Lankan troops kill 55 rebels in sea, land battles

AP, Colombo

At least 55 Tamil Tiger rebels have been killed in land and sea battles on Sri Lanka's northeast coast as an army offensive moves forward in a bid to end 25 years of civil war, the military said yesterday.

Military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said 26 rebels were killed in a sea battle Monday off Chalai. Four boats belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were sunk in the battle, which lasted about four hours before dawn.

A leader of the Sea Tigers the rebels' naval wing was among the dead while one government sailor died and three were wounded, he said.

Heavy ground battles between the army troops and the guerrillas on Sunday left 29 rebels dead, Nanayakkara said. The fighting came after government forces broke through a fortification built by the Tigers to defend their last strip of land on Sunday.

A military statement said another senior Sea Tiger leader, known as Uththaman, who commanded the ground battle, was also killed. Nanayakkara did not provide details of casualties suffered by army troops.

Verification of the reports was not possible because independent journalists are not allowed into the conflict area.

The rebels built a number of earth fortifica-

tions and ditches in an attempt to defend their key strongholds in recent months, but a series of government victories has pinned the rebels back into just 8.4 square miles (21 square kilometres) of jungle and beach, which mostly includes a government declared "no-fire" zone for people fleeing the fighting.

The government says its forces are close to ending the Tamil Tigers' separatist campaign, though there has been intense concern for the tens of thousands of civilians trapped in the war zone.

The UN says an estimated 150,000 to 190,000 people are trapped inside the territory, resulting in dozens of deaths each day. But the government says the figure on the number of trapped is less than half the UN's estimate.

It accuses the rebels of holding the civilians as human shields. The statement posted Monday on the Ministry of Defence Web site accused the rebels "mounting heavy artillery and mortar attacks from the government declared 'no-fire' zone."

Tamil Tiger rebels have fought since 1983 to create an independent homeland for ethnic minority Tamils, who have faced decades of marginalisation by successive governments controlled by ethnic Sinhalese. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the violence.

Myanmar to fence border 100m off zero line

Says Hasan Mahmud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar will erect barbed wire fence 100 metres off the 'no-man's land' along 40 kms of Bangladesh-Myanmar border to check smuggling, including drug trafficking, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hasan Mahmud said yesterday.

"Myanmar's ambassador has officially informed us of this," he said while clarifying the distance of the fencing from the zero point whether it will be 13 km or 13 metres.

The government will also investigate the matter of hacking the classified documents of 103 countries, including Bangladesh, by a cyber spy network based

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Banned Kuwait-based NGO runs covertly

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

The Bangladesh chapter of Kuwait-based NGO Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) is still running its offices and covert activities although its registration was cancelled nearly two years ago.

The NGO spends at least Tk 2 lakh a month, said a few contractors who worked for RIHS. But the source of this money remains mysterious because foreign funding of RIHS was stopped and its bank accounts closed following the cancellation of registration, they said.

Senior officials of the NGO are meanwhile lobbying hard within the present government either for reconsideration of the cancellation of its registration or for getting permission to continue activities in some other name.

The NGO Affairs Bureau cancelled RIHS's registration in May 2007 following a government decision made over intelligence recommendations. Ahle Hadith Andolon (Ahab) chief Asadullah Al Galib had helped RIHS get registered in November 1996.

The organisation has appealed to the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

GAZIPUR EXPLOSIVES SEIZURE 3 charge sheets against JMB men

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police have submitted charge sheets in three cases in connection with the seizure of explosive materials from the operatives of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and detonating explosive at district police super's office.

Detective branch (DB) officials of Gazipur district submitted the charge sheets with Chief Judicial Magistrate Court Sunday after investigating the three cases filed with Tongi and Joydevpur police stations.

The cases were filed in connection with the arrests of militants Mamun, Mina, Marzia and Noorjahan at Khortoil in Tongi

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

CTG ARMS HAUL CID asks for list of on-duty coastguards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is going to start interrogating Coast Guard members soon in connection with 10 truckloads of firearms hauled at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited jetty on April 02, 2004.

The CID has asked for an on-duty-men-list to the Chittagong Zone Coast Guard

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Prayer Timing		
March 31		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-20	6-25
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

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