

Quick energy

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one-hour daylight saving scheme, which is likely to be introduced from June, would save another 250mw power.

He notes that within this year the government would take all major decisions in the energy sector and complete the tender process for the 450mw Bibiyana, Sirajganj and Meghnaghat-3 power projects.

These projects would however take no less than 36 months to complete after signing of the agreements.

But since the gas supply projection is grim, all of these power projects, including Bibiyana that is situated close to the gas field of the same name, would have dual fuel capacity. This means if there is gas shortage, these plants can run on imported fuel oil.

The adviser defends the government's position about making no major decision so far in the energy sector saying, "We are doing home work. The gas situation is critical. We'll soon make decisions on gas exploration and award offshore contracts (that are awaiting government decision for nearly a year)."

"But to have gas from those ventures, it will take five to seven years. Meanwhile, the existing resources are depleting. So we have to improve our efficiency. "We need to get more value for our gas. We need to reduce our inefficiency in gas usage. For instance, we'll have to find ways to mutate those old [gas-fired] industrial boilers to become more efficient equipment," he observes.

He adds that adding a burner to the equipment can turn a gas-fired boiler to an oil-fired one.

The groundwork of importing CFL bulbs has already begun. The Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) would check the standard of the CFL bulbs. The import will follow a certain standard of products and set the future standard," he says.

He goes on to say that all future equipment should have a standard for energy efficiency.

"For instance, there are colour LCD televisions now which consume only 5 watt power. There is now refrigeration or AC which is very energy efficient," Dr Chowdhury points out.

The dilemma is how we define [the standard] for a technology that is not restrictive," he adds.

Regarding the joint venture framework for private-public initiative in power and energy, Dr Chowdhury adds the government was setting a criterion for what kind of private investor can take part in a joint venture with the public sector enterprise. The framework aims at ensuring transparency and real investors in the selection process.

PM-Saudi king

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From now on, if any Bangladeshi worker is sacked by a company, he can join another company without flying back to the country.

According to unofficial statistics, around 25 lakh Bangladeshis now work in Saudi Arabia.

Dipu Moni said, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and King Abdullah also discussed recruitment of more skilled and semi-skilled workers, including doctors and engineers, from Bangladesh."

Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia will sign two agreements on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investment, and Avoidance of Double Taxation, which are now at the final stage of processing, he said.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan will be in Riyadh this week to sign the deals.

Bangladesh side requested the Saudi authorities to import Bangladeshi goods including ceramics and garments.

Sheikh Hasina sought peace of the Muslim ummah and hoped that the Arab Peace Plan under the leadership of the Saudi king would be implemented.

At the talks, the PM was assisted by Dipu Moni, Labour, Overseas Employment and Expatriate Welfare Minister Khandker Mosharrar Hossain and State Minister for Labour Munnunuj Sufian.

Envoys willing to invest in water treatment plants: minister

UNB, Dhaka

LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam yesterday said many ambassadors are expressing willingness to invest in water treatment plants but the process is delayed by the Economic Relations Division of the finance ministry.

"We have placed it before the prime minister as to how it (foreign investment) can be easily processed in short time," he told a crisis-resolution meeting at his ministry as reports say the city-dwellers faced serious water crisis.

Ashrafur presided over the meeting, attended by LGRD State Minister Jahangir Kabir Nanak, MPs elected from the capital, senior Wasa officials and ministry officials concerned.

The minister also disclosed that the government is thinking of launching political campaign in the capital for the use of surface water instead of extracting deep water, as the groundwater layers are gradually going down.

"We have to launch political campaign in Dhaka city as there is no other option except using the surface water instead of using deep tube-wells," Ashrafur said.

Admitting that water crisis is acute in the capital city during this dry-season, the minister stressed the need for holding regular follow-up meetings with the local MPs to find the solutions with the assistance of Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) officials.

Ashrafur said the LGRD ministry would hold regular meetings with the Wasa officials from next month to follow up the tasks going on under the supervision of Dhaka Wasa authorities.

"Everybody can be easily informed of the matters if the meeting discusses it regularly."

About facing problems related to law and order situation in the capital, he suggested that the home minister should hold meetings with the local MPs to find the remedies. "I have told the home minister to sit in a meeting with the MPs to find solutions."

The speakers at the meeting demanded that the government should ensure uninterrupted power supply to mitigate the water crisis facing the city-dwellers. They also urged the government to take immediate action against the illegal connectors of waterlines.

According to documents submitted to the meeting, Dhaka Wasa on average produces 194 crore litres of water daily against the demand for 225 crore with 514 deep tube-wells and four water-treatment plants. Of the produced water, some 86 percent is extracted from deep layers and the rest 14 percent from surface water.

The Petrolabangla supplies 1,850 mmcf/d gas against a demand of more than 2,000 mmcf/d.

However, a Petrobangla expert says, "The 2,000 mmcf/d demand hits for only a few hours a day. On average, the daily demand is around 1,650 mmcf/d. If the government can implement a gas load management system, may be we can minimise the shortfall now."

The PDB, on the other hand, disagrees.

An official says the gas supply pressure was erratic. As a result many power plants cannot generate power in any given time throughout the week.

"On one occasion when other major gas consumers like fertilizer factories were closed, we had enough gas to generate up to a record 4,200 mw power," he adds.

would be strengthened in the days to come."

Expatriates' welfare, one of the issues on top of the PM's agenda in her first overseas visit after assumption of power, was among the topics that came up at the meeting.

Prince Faisal also separately met Dipu Moni.

Deputy Labour Minister of Saudi Arabia Dr Abdul Wahed bin Al Humaidi had a meeting with Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain at the Conference Palace. They discussed recruitment of Bangladeshi workers and problems facing them.

Mosharrar Hossain told reporters that the Saudi government would enact law so that recruiting agencies and companies "cannot deceive Bangladeshi workers in terms of payments".

Asked about fresh recruitment of workers from Bangladesh, he said, "When the Saudi economy will be vibrant, they will recruit workers according to their requirement."

Sheikh Hasina arrived here yesterday morning on a five-day official visit for holding talks with the Saudi king and performing Umrah in Makkah.

Dr Saud bin Saeed al Mat'hami, Minister-in-Charge of Shoura Council Affairs, received the prime minister at King Khaled International Airport at 3:15 am (local time). Bangladesh Ambassador in Saudi Arabia Fazlul Karim and Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Dr Abdullah Bin Naser Al Busairi, among others, were present at the airport.

The PM then drove straight to the Conference Palace in a ceremonial motorcade.

Hasina's entourage also includes State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hasan Mahmud, Rehana Siddique and Sajeeb Wazed.

AL constitution

FROM PAGE 1
December 26, 2002, cannot perform as the party's chief executive since August 2007 following his detention and later 'desire of the party president'.

The constitution submitted to the Election Commission for being registered as a parliamentary party, however, allows Jaiil to discharge his party functions. It also does not allow anybody to act as general secretary as long as he is available.

Only in case of absence of the general secretary for any work, his functions and responsibilities shall be vested in the joint general secretary in order of seniority.

As per the AL constitution, AL Joint General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam was made acting general secretary when Jaiil was unable to discharge his functions due to his detention.

But Jaiil came out of the jail and became a lawmaker through the December 29 parliamentary elections. He later assumed the office of the general secretary but was not allowed to work as party's chief executive officer. It goes against the AL's constitution.

But the AL's official website [www.albd.org] shows that Syed Ashrafur Islam is the acting general secretary while Jaiil is the general secretary of the party.

Syed Ashrafur, who is now the party's spokesperson, is apparently performing the duties of general secretary.

Jaiil discussed it with AL President Sheikh Hasina but could not get a satisfactory reply.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star yesterday,

BDR mutiny

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Replying to a query, he said some grenades and ammunition went missing during the carnage but they are not yet sure whether any RPG or mortar shell went missing adding it will be cleared after the counting of those dead.

The BDR men left arms, ammunition and grenades wherever they could while fleeing, especially near the places where they took shelter. Besides Ganakuli, some fire-arms were found in Birban Kasra, Moneshwar Road and Pikhkhana in Hazaribagh in abandoned condition. Some of the firearms and grenades were recovered from the houses of BDR mutineers outside the capital.

A top official of Rab wishing anonymity said these missing arms and ammunition and grenades will pose a threat to law and order if those are handed over to criminals.

Meanwhile, the BDR authorities recovered two more cellphone sets of two victims of the Pikhkhana carnage from the residence of BDR civil staff Berek Rakhil in the headquarters yesterday.

Besides, 17 more residences of BDR headquarters were vacated yesterday. With those, 404 residences out of around 1,000 have been so far vacated.

A Dhaka court showed 44 more BDR personnel arrested in the mutiny case following a petition of the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case and ordered to send them to jail later.

The court also placed two suspected mutineers -- sepoy Sazzad Hossain and Afrur Rahman -- on a five-day remand each for interrogation in the mutiny case.

With the 44, the number of total arrested BDR personnel stands at 1144.

NBR scales
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collection target in the current FY is Tk 54,500 crore.

The finance minister said budgetary targets including revenue earning would be finalised next month.

He said the World Bank and IMF spring meeting would be held on April 25-26 in Washington. Later, the IMF will publish the World Economic Outlook.

"We will then be able to realise the world economic situation... We will finalise our budget keeping in view the outcome of the meeting."

In the first nine months (July-March) of the current FY, the NBR collected Tk 35,080 crore revenue. NBR officials said the amount was Tk 2,500-3000 crore less than the target.

The NBR will have to collect around Tk 20,000 crore in the last three of this FY to achieve the target.

In reply to a question, NBR Chairman Nasiruddin Ahmed said they are hopeful of meeting the target.

Muhith told journalists that they would take initiative to increase revenue collection by amending laws relating to income tax, VAT and other taxes.

Formation of any 'reform commission' would not serve the purpose, he said, adding they will achieve the revenue target by reforming relevant laws.

The government will take initiative for submission of tax returns online next year. It will lessen sufferings of taxpayers, the ministers said.

Jaiil said, "I didn't want to be a minister. Why can't I perform my duties given by the council? What sort of crime is this?"

Replying to a query whether he has raised the issue within the party, he said, "Yes, I have. I have informed her (Sheikh Hasina) about this."

As per the AL's constitution, its general secretary has the right to give advice and orders to all department secretaries to discharge their functions.

The constitution empowers the general secretary to call a meeting of the secretaries at least once a month and, after discussing the progress of departmental functions in that meeting, take decision but the power of the final decision shall lie with the executive committee.

The general secretary shall make arrangements so that the decisions taken by the president, executive committee, national committee and Bangladesh Awami League, are fully executed through various departments.

The constitution also empowers the general secretary to keep control of the party's fund. As per the constitution, the total fund of the organisation shall be entrusted with the treasurer who shall operate the accounts of the party under joint signature with the president. Upon receiving a written receipt from the general secretary, the treasurer shall give the money according to the party constitution.

But Jaiil, as general secretary of the party, is not allowed to do any of the work in line with the AL constitution.

30 hurt
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least 30 people, including five policemen, were injured in the incident.

Police sources said around 117 rubber bullets were used during the siege, which started at about 11:30 Monday night. However, the protesters claimed that the police fired more than 300 rubber bullets.

The chaotic situation erupted at about 11:00pm from a Baishakhi Mela organised by Birganj upazila Awami League supporters at Birganj Dakarkhana Math, just 100 metres from the police station.

Sources said the organisers of the fair arranged a lottery Monday night but they tried to leave the venue without distributing prizes among the winners.

At one stage, buyers of the lottery tickets staged a demonstration and tried to stop the organizers from leaving. On information, police rushed to the spot and charged batons on the protesters, locals alleged.

Following the baton charge, around 3,000 people from nearby areas regrouped at about 12:30am and attacked the police station. They damaged windowpanes of the police station by throwing bricksbats from outside.

Additional police force from Dinajpur led by Superintendent of Police Md Abu Kalam Siddique rushed to the spot around 1:30am and brought the situation under control by dispersing the agitating people at 2:00am.

A one-member probe team under additional district magistrate Md Mokbul Hossain has been formed to investigate the incident. The team was asked to submit the report within three days.

Outraged
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in the morning minutes after power went off.

Local sources said electricity supply had been cut off for five hours since 11:00pm Monday to 4:00am yesterday, causing untold sufferings for the local residents, especially for students who are taking the ongoing higher secondary certificate examinations, in extremely hot and humid weather.

Later, the demonstrators blockaded Dhaka-Gopaldi and Arabhajar-Narsingdi roads by felling trees and setting fire to tires at several points, disrupting traffic for five hours.

At one stage, the demonstrators took position in front of the power sub-station located at Ramchandra and started throwing stones and bricksbats at it, damaging the sub-station.

During the attack, the demonstrators got locked in a violent clash with police who had rushed in to bring the situation under control.

The stone throwing protesters also damaged a police camp in Jalakandi area, and vandalised two buses and a motorbike during the clash.

Awami League leaders Latif Molla, Salauddin Master, and Jubo League leaders Moazzem Haque, Jewel, Abdul Berek, Mala, Mintu, Mukul, Zilani, Tajul and Islam are among the protesters injured in the clash.

The situation calmed down after police had a meeting with the demonstrators around 11:30am.

Kaiser Talukder, assistant general manager of Narayanangal Palli Biddyt Samiti, said the power supply situation in the area will improve within a week.

Ahad Ali made NSC chairman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar as the chairman of National Sports Council (NSC), said a PID handout.

Earlier on Monday, Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed--citing personal reasons--resigned from the NSC chairman position. He was appointed as the sports council chairman on July 8, 2007 through a presidential order.

Moeen's resignation followed the controversial sponsorship deal between Bangladesh Football Federation and Bashundhara Group.

Elephants kill 3 in Cox's Bazar

A CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A man and his two nieces were trampled to death by a herd of wild elephants at Lechuaprang village of Teknaf upazila in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Fazal Ahmed, 20, Laila Begum, 10, and Kohinoor Begum, 10.

Police and witnesses said the three went to the nearby reserved forest to collect firewood and fell victim to the rage of the elephants at about 12:00 noon.

Fazal and Laila died on the spot while Kohinoor in the local health centre.

Hnila union health centre physician Abdullah Md Shahed said the victims' bodies were badly mutilated.

Forest Department Teknaf Range Officer Abdul Quader said the wild elephants are going berserk as they are not getting sufficient water in this hot weather.

Sohel Taj
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The government is planning to rehabilitate the "misguided poor and innocent people" who tend to get involved in militancy, he said.

"Militants are recruited in three tiers and the most crucial is the phase when they infiltrate the administration, army and media," he told the newly elected leaders of Bangladesh Crime Reporters' Association (CRAB) at the home ministry.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun and Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikdar were also present.

Economically disadvantaged youths are lured into militant outfits through misinterpretation of religion, said Sohel Taj.

"All except the killers and bombers will be rehabilitated," the state minister said, adding that the government is planning to rehabilitate them to change their course of life.

Militancy is not only the problem involving madrasas--it may be bred in schools and colleges, he said adding, "We must root out militancy wherever it is hidden."

About trial of war criminals, he said, "This is the opportune moment to try them and we must not let it slip away."

Sahara Khatun urged the CRAB members to make a constructive criticism of government actions through their reports.

Nails driven
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house when Hawladar refused to pay any toll. They got hold of the three painters Ilias, 30, Abdur Rashid, 30, and Abu Taher, 35 and hammered nails into their hands.

Local people said Sohrab, an accused in a double murder case, had recently returned to the area after a long period of absence and resumed his old activities again, threatening people for money and toll.

A case has been filed in this regard.

Fatullah thana officer-in-charge Jibon Kanti Sarker told The Daily Star, "I heard that one worker was injured, not three. Police are trying to arrest the miscreants."

Agents hailed

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intelligence agency in efforts to have an Awami League minus Sheikh Hasina."

They held meetings with DGF officials every morning and afternoon, he added. "Tell me who didn't act as agents?"

Referring to LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam, he asked, "Under whose assurance he returned after fleeing to London?"

"Amu, Razzak, Tofail and Suranjit have committed a crime by attempting to get rid of Sheikh Hasina in the name of reforms."

"But what wrong did I do? I took her side. It's not right that I'm being punished and those who schemed against the party are better off."

Asked if he thinks raising these allegations might harm him, he said, "I've got nothing to fear as long as my people are with me."

Jaiil, now a member of parliament from Naogaon-5, was arrested by the army-led joint forces in May 2007. He flew to Singapore after being released on parole for treatment in March last year. He returned home in August and obtained bail in September.

In yesterday's interview, he described the conditions under which he issued the much-talked about letter where he levelled many an allegation against Hasina, and seemingly agreed to quit politics during the caretaker government rule.

"I didn't write any letter and neither did my wife. She only filed a three-sentence appeal for my release on health grounds."

"It was DGF who issued the letter, and it was their men who posing as journalists distributed copies of the letter."

"They would torture me every night to have me sign the so-called letter. After several days, I gave in as they threatened to arrest my wife and children."

Jaiil observed that the AL constitution has been violated for not letting him play the role of general secretary.

"I didn't want to be a minister. All I want is to discharge the duties as general secretary elected by a council. I don't know what I did to deserve this."

Queried if he would quit the post, he said, "I will not resign. I will continue my fight against all that is unjust."

Asked whether he has raised the issue at party forum, he replied, "Yes, I have talked to her [Sheikh Hasina] about this. In a letter around a month back, I've asked her under which rules the joint general secretary-2 issues official letters and cards when the general secretary is still there."

"I requested her to tell me if it's her order. If it's hers, I told

her, I'd rethink my future. And if it's not, it should be corrected. She however did not reply to my queries."

Asked if he had spoken to the AL president before declaring himself fit to assume the role as general secretary after being freed on bail, he said, "How can you think I'd do that without speaking to her?"

"I told her I'm getting back home, and that I can't secure bail if I don't return. She said, 'Ok, go ahead but be careful.'"

Asked who he would blame for the way he finds himself now, he said, "None. It's my fate. It's because I took a firm stand in favour of Sheikh Hasina."

Talking about the government and the party, he said, "Infiltrators are damaging both and will continue to do so."

On the notice served on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to vacate her cantonment residence, Jaiil said, "Cantonment is not a place to do politics; the government has taken the right decision."

Mentioning the BDR carnage, he said the prime minister scotched the conspiracies successfully and that too all on her own.

About the performance of the government so far, he said, "The prices of essentials have come down, farmers are happy with the low price of fertilizer, production has gone up and people are inspired."

"The entire nation is rallying around Sheikh Hasina for war criminal."

Salary
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The commission would also recommend increasing the retirement age of the government staffs as the average age has gone up in the country. At present the retirement age for the government staffs is 57 years.

The commission would also recommend formation of a service commission to remove anomalies in different cadre services and scales.

The immediate past caretaker government formed the Pay Commission in September last year.

Finance ministry sources say the Pay Commission recommendations would be implemented in the upcoming fiscal year but it will be executed in phases.

The finance ministry will form another committee to find ways to implement the Pay Commission recommendations.

The fallout of the world economic recession might be stronger next fiscal year. Against that backdrop, the finance ministry will make a final decision as to how much the salaries might be raised in line with the recommendations.

Lankan rebels

FROM PAGE 16
"The LTTE has not responded to the government's call to surrender, so we are keeping up our offensive to rescue the civilians," military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said as the midday (0630 GMT) deadline passed.

The government says its troops were poised to defeat the LTTE, a hardened guerrilla group that has been fighting for an independent Tamil homeland on the ethnic Sinhalese-majority island since the 1970s.

But the defence ministry said nearly 50,000 men, women and children managed to escape on Monday after troops punctured rebel defences at Puttimalana, inside the rebel-held area in the island's northeast.

It also said 17 civilians who tried to escape from rebel-held territory on Monday had been killed by the guerrillas while another 373 had been wounded.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet website reported the area was littered with the bodies of hundreds of civilians it said were killed in government shelling.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was concerned that the final offensive against the LTTE could lead to a "dramatic increase" in civilian casualties, a concern echoed by the UN.

"The situation is nothing short of catastrophic. Ongoing fighting has killed or wounded hundreds of civilians who have only minimal access to medical care," ICRC's Director of Operations Pierre Kraehenbuehl said in Geneva.

In Washington, a US official warned on Monday that time was running out for a deal that he hoped would bring lasting peace to Sri Lanka.

Michael Owen, the acting deputy assistant secretary of state for South Asia, said Sri Lanka should offer a package in which the Tigers hand in their arms, possibly to a third party, in exchange for amnesty for low-level cadres.

During the surrender, both sides would hold fire and let civilians leave, he said.

"We are running out of time," Owen told the Brookings Institution think-tank. "Really, there is literally only a couple of days to try to get this finalised."

Sri Lanka's government has resisted calls for any international intervention and for a prolonged pause in the military campaign to minimise the humanitarian suffering.

The government estimates show another 30,000 civilians could still be held by the Tigers but the United Nations says the number could be twice as high and warned Tuesday that an all-out assault risked a bloodbath.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the escape of the civilians but was "deeply concerned" about those still trapped, his office said.