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Gas rationing for industries mulled to better power supply

5 fertiliser units, a dozen smaller power plants to be kept shut in phases

SHARIER KHAN

To tackle the ongoing gas supply and pressure crisis, the government has planned staggered holidays on seven days of the week in seven industrial zones around Dhaka, and shutting down five fertiliser plants and a dozen 210 megawatt (MW) power plants in phases over the next 12 months.

If this plan is executed, it would reduce gas demand by around 100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf), help increase power generation by around 400 MW and reduce load shedding, said a Petrobangla source.

The country is reeling under a power crisis of more than 1,000 MW every day.

Demand for gas now is 2,250 mmcf while Petrobangla can supply up to 1,920 mmcf.

Due to gas supply shortfall and fluctuating gas pressure, the country's gas-fired power plants cannot generate more than 500 MW power despite having the capacity to do so. Poor gas pressure is also affecting operation of various industries around Dhaka, hampering productivity.

Shutting down the five fertiliser plants -- each for a month for annual maintenance -- would save between 15 and 45 mmcf of gas.

After five months of this planned routine, more than a dozen 210 MW power plants -- each of which consume 45 to 50 mmcf of gas -- would be shut down for annual maintenance for seven months.

While ending erratic gas pressure due to excessive consumption require installation of three gas compressors, Gas Transmission Company Ltd

(GTCL) and Petrobangla authorities remain undecided about installing the compressors due to lack of funds.

A tender for the compressors bagged a price offer of \$ 150 million against their budget of \$53 million with a loan from Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Sources said this fund crisis could be overcome by taking fresh loans from the ADB. But, for some unknown reasons, the GTCL and Petrobangla are unwilling to do so.

Meanwhile, the energy ministry took the initiative to ration gas supply. This rationing follows power rationing to seven industrial zones with staggered holidays during a certain period of the immediate past caretaker government's tenure.

Petrobangla, Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution

Company and Bakhrabad Gas Systems held a meeting with chamber leaders, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) last week to discuss the idea. The business leaders welcomed it as a stop-gap measure.

Petrobangla and Titas would now sit with Power Development Board (PDB) to coordinate staggered holidays in the industrial zones as well as scheduling how the dozen-plus large power plants can be shut down for maintenance over a period of seven months later this year.

"A committee will be formed with representatives from the chambers, Petrobangla and Titas. The committee will recommend how soon to stagger

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Over 140 Taliban killed in Swat offensive

Army ordered to 'eliminate' militants; one million displaced in northwest Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad/ Peshawar

Pakistan said yesterday an air and ground offensive to crush the Taliban in the northwest killed more than 140 militants and seven soldiers in an escalating conflict that has displaced hundreds of thousands.

Warplanes bombed rebel hideouts in the Swat valley, an ex-ski resort, where up to 15,000 security forces are deployed under orders to wipe out extremists branded by Washington as a terror threat to the West.

"The army is now engaged in a full-scale operation to eliminate miscreants," military spokesman Major

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Landslide near Bagan Para of Ruma in Bandarban district on Wednesday blocked the flow of the Shankha river. Water that swelled on one side started to flow over the 20-foot blockade yesterday. Communication through the hill river also has come to a halt.

Landslide blocks Shankha flow

MONIRUL ISLAM MANU, Bandarban

Sand and stone from an unprecedented landslide created a natural dam on the Shankha river at Bandarban, completely obstructing its flow for over 60 hours since early hours Wednesday.

Communication through the river has remained snapped because of the 20-foot long blockade across the 25-foot width of the river at Galenga in Ruma upazila of the district. This has affected the businesses in the area.

Yesterday afternoon water started flowing over the stone obstruction.

Kya Ching Karbari, chief of Bagan Para village adjacent to the spot of landslide, said this is the first time they have witnessed the unheard of incident that the flow of the Shankha has remained snapped for 60 hours.

Karbari said they noticed a huge crack long ago at a part of the hill named Walu Tang where the landslide occurred. He said he heard a huge sound at 2:00am Wednesday and then saw that stones have created a huge dam on the river.

Soon water started increasing on one side, causing fear among the locals of a sudden breaking of the dam. Indigenous people began praying to avoid the impending disaster likely to be caused by this.

However, none at the Water Development Board office in Bandarban was found for comments.

The livelihood in Bandarban flourished mainly centring the Shankha river. Originating from within the country, the Shankha

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Security in diplomatic zone in city beefed up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Security measures were beefed up at the diplomatic zone in Baridhara-Gulshan in the capital yesterday after militants Thursday night issued threats to blow up four embassies.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner AKM Shahidul Haq told The Daily Star, "Unknown criminals sent faxes to the embassies of USA, Canada, Britain and Australia threatening to blow them up. They claimed to be Jemaah Islamiyah al-Qaeda but we are not sure whether there is any such organisation."

"Following this, we held separate coordination meetings with those embassies," the DMP commissioner said, adding, "Security measures have been beefed up with the

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MEETING BUDGET DEMAND Govt to make sure of getting all aid in the pipeline

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has planned to collect \$2.23 billion (Tk 15,580 crore) foreign aid in the next fiscal year to meet the demand of a big size development budget.

From this amount the agriculture sector will get 99 percent more, power sector 47 percent, energy sector 73 percent more than what was allocated for the sectors in the revised budget of the current fiscal year.

Finance ministry sources said the Economic Relations Division (ERD) has prepared the plan based on the undisbursed foreign aid from different donor agencies and countries now in the pipeline.

The sources said the local representatives of all donors will hold a meeting with the government on May 14 where Finance Minister AMA Muhiith will present the government policy and programmes to them.

Ministry sources said Bangladesh would seek additional aid in the wake of the global recession.

The ERD prepared the plan for foreign aid, estimating the ADP in the next fiscal year's budget at Tk 30,500 crore. In the revised ADP of the current fiscal year, the estimate for foreign aid is \$1.94 billion (Tk 13,410 crore).

Of the \$2.23 billion projected foreign aid, grant is \$765 million (Tk 5,320 crore) and loan \$1,465 million (Tk 10,255 crore).

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3 hijackers beaten to death at Keraniganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mob beat three hijackers to death and critically injured another at Keraniganj as the criminals attempted to snatch an auto-rickshaw Thursday night.

The deceased were identified as Akhter Hossain, 45, Shah Alam, 32, and Selim, 48. The criminal injured in the incident was Akash, 27, son of Mofiz Khan of Wapda Lane.

Police said the gang hired the auto-rickshaw from Kadamtoli intersection for Stand Bazar in South Keraniganj around 9:30pm.

On the way, at Mirzapur the snatchers throttled the driver with a piece of cloth and compelled him to stop, said police. They then pushed him out of the vehicle at knife point, police added.

Around 200 people of the densely populated area thronged the spot hearing driver Faruque's scream and intercepted the running snatched auto-rickshaw.

Locals said the vehicle fell into a roadside ditch as they tried to stop it.

The mob dragged all four snatchers out of the auto-rickshaw and gave them a good beating leaving them critically injured, police said.

On information police went to the spot and took the injured to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 11:30pm. Three of the gang members succumbed to their injuries around 1:30am yesterday.

Diver Faruque and snatcher Akash were released from the hospital after primary treatment, said police. Akash was taken in police custody, they added.

Mohammad Arif, owner of the auto-rickshaw, filed a case with the South Keraniganj Police Station in this regard.

Earlier on April 22, two other auto-rickshaw snatchers were killed in a mob beating at Tajira village in the same area.

Rejoinder and our reply

The home ministry differed with a portion of a report published in The Daily Star on May 7, headlined "AL men blamed for law, order slide".

A ministry rejoinder said a portion of the report which reads, "Top officials of law enforcement agencies yesterday blamed Awami League men for deterioration of law and order, identifying extortion and tender manipulation by the party men as main reasons behind it", is not based on facts.

The rejoinder added that under no circumstances the minister, state minister, or top officials of law enforcers had discussed at Wednesday's meeting the issue as it was raised in the headline of the report. The meeting was focused on the over all law and

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ALLEGATION AGAINST KOKO ACC probing NCT files

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has started examining files related to the construction of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) in the money laundering case filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's youngest son Arafat Rahman Koko.

Investigation Officer of the case ACC Deputy Director Md Abu Sayeed examined the files of China Harbour Engineering Company that constructed the terminal and seized two files on Wednesday.

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