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Power projects go slow

Shift from gas-based plants, undue influence on bidding slow down implementation of most plants

SHARIER KHAN

The government initiatives to implement various power projects are going slow due to a host of issues including moving to dual-fuel plants from gas-fired plants and a ruling party man's bid to grab power deals.

So far the Power Development Board under the Awami League government forwarded two public sector power projects, upon selecting the lowest bidder, for approval of the cabinet's purchase committee.

Earlier, the government floated tender processes for the 450 megawatt power plant in Bibiyana, a 300MW plant in Siddhirganj and a 150MW plant in Khulna but it is taking a long time to complete these processes. The government is set to float tender for another 150MW project in Sirajganj next week.

According to sources in the PDB and the power ministry, one of the reasons for taking such a long time for these power projects was non-availability of natural gas. As Petrobangla could not confirm gas

supply to all the planned power projects, the government took some time to take steps that would ensure the future power plants do not sit idle even if Petrobangla fails to provide gas.

The solution was making all the future power projects dual-fuel plants--natural gas and petroleum fuel.

While dual-fuel plants make a power project costlier by at least 10 percent, the government realised upon processing the tenders that it needed to create the infrastructure for supplying and storing alternative fuel for the plants spending additional funds.

"The other issue that is slowing down the tender processes is the undue influence of a powerful ruling party man over some officials of the PDB, the Electricity Generation Company of Bangladesh, the Power Cell and North-West Power Generation Company Ltd. He is representing almost all the Chinese power companies and wants different authorities relax various tender terms to accommodate bids of these Chinese companies," said an official.

Big, small, experienced or inexperienced, Chinese power companies have a general tendency not to fully comply with tender requirements, he adds.

"Either they do not understand the tender terms and conditions or they trivialise the processes because they are backed by someone with political connections," the official notes.

This is reflected in the tender processes of two power projects that are currently awaiting the government nod. These are the Chandpur 150MW combined cycle power project and the Sylhet 150MW gas turbine power project.

Both the projects were awarded to two Chinese companies that are represented by the powerful ruling party man.

Chinese company Harbin previously won the Chandpur project but it was cancelled during the last caretaker government's rule when it wanted to increase the project's budget. Now the project has been awarded to China Chenga Electrical Ltd with a target to have it commissioned by December 2011.

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Advocate Umme Razia Kajal, a victim of the August 21 grenade attack, breaks down in tears in front of the makeshift memorial on Bangabandhu Avenue after placing flowers there.

PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

WHO predicts 'explosion' in swine flu cases

AP, Beijing

The global spread of swine flu will endanger more lives as it speeds up in coming months and governments must boost preparations for a swift response, the World Health Organisation said yesterday.

There will soon be a period of further global spread of the virus, and most countries may see swine flu cases double every three to four days for several months until peak transmission is reached, said WHO's Western Pacific director, Shin Young-soo.

"At a certain point, there will seem to be an explosion in case numbers," Shin told a symposium of health officials and experts in Beijing. "It is certain there will be more cases and more deaths."

WHO has declared the swine flu strain a pandemic, and it has killed almost 1,800 people worldwide through last week. International attention has focused on how the pandemic is progressing in southern hemisphere countries such as Australia, which are experiencing winter and their flu season.

But it is in developing countries where the accelerated spread of swine flu poses the greatest threat as it places under-equipped and underfunded health systems under severe strain, Shin said.

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11 more cases detected in Bangladesh

Number rises to 98

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eleven new cases of swine flu were detected in the country in the last 24 hours, taking the number of infected people to 98.

Six of the new cases are imported and three contracted from infected persons while two were detected through the government's 13 surveillance programmes across the country, Director of Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research Prof Mahmudur Rahman said.

Health experts, however, said they are "well equipped to handle even a large outbreak" and urged people not to panic at the rise in swine flu infection cases.

"We cannot avoid a pandemic like the swine flu. But

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Essentials' prices up despite govt efforts to control

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and WASIM BIN HABIB

Prices of essentials witnessed a sharp rise in both wholesale and retail markets in the capital yesterday, a day after the commerce minister had fixed the wholesale prices of some daily necessities.

Taking the opportunity of weak market monitoring, traders in kitchen markets are charging higher prices at will on the eve of Ramadan, alleged many shoppers.

After visits to different city markets, The Daily Star correspondents found varying prices of the same commodity in different shops and a huge difference between the prices charged at the city markets and those fixed by the government.

On Thursday the government fixed the wholesale prices of potato, onion, garlic and ginger to ensure stability of prices in the kitchen markets during Ramadan.

As per the government-fixed rates, the wholesale prices of potato to be sold at cold storage gates will range between Tk 22 and Tk 23 per kg, onion Tk 16 and 19 per kg, garlic and ginger Tk 55 and 60 per kg.

Interestingly, the prices of these items went up in the wholesale market yesterday. A kilogram of potato was selling for Tk 24-26, onion Tk 17-37, garlic and ginger Tk 60-100 per kg.

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Ramadan begins tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

The holy month of Ramadan, the lunar month of self-purification through fasting and abstinence, begins Sunday as the new moon was not sighted anywhere in Bangladesh sky yesterday.

The National Moon Sighting Committee took the decision in a meeting held at the Islamic Foundation yesterday night after reviewing reports on moon sighting for the holy month of Ramadan.

To observe the holy month, the government has fixed Sunday to Thursday office hours from 9:30am to 4:00pm with a 15-minute break for prayers from 2:15pm, for government, semi-government, autonomous, and semi-autonomous organisations.

Culprits must be punished

Hasina tells discussion on Aug 21 attack anniversary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday vowed to bring to book the masterminds behind the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally through proper probe.

"Our government will surely conduct a thorough investigation into the grenade attack. The culprits, no matter how powerful they may be, will be punished," said Hasina, also the president of ruling party, at a discussion at the Institution of Engineers' Bangladesh.

AL organised the discussion chaired by Deputy Leader of parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury marking the fifth anniversary of the grenade attack.

On this day in 2004, 24 people including AL leader Ivy Rahman, wife of President Zillur Rahman, were killed and 500 others got injured in the grenade attack on an AL rally.

Hasina, who narrowly escaped the attack, held the then BNP-Jamaat coalition government and its top leadership responsible for the attack.

Addressing the discussion as chief guest, Hasina said they have already received a lot of information on the perpetrators

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Gabtolli cattle market in bad shape

DCC makes little effort for its development

HELEMUL ALAM

The Gabtoli cattle market has seen little development in last 10 years, though it gave Dhaka City Corporation over Tk 80 crore in revenues during the period.

Over a thousand traders have to run business there knee-to-waist in deep muddy water during the rainy season because of poor drainage system.

Traders said all the tin-roofed cattle sheds of the market are damaged and now they are posing serious risk of accident.

Gabtoli, one of the largest cattle markets of the country, also has no place for the traders to take rest even for a few hours which compels them to sleep in the open or under tattered cattle sheds.

A DCC official said the corporation leased the cattle market for one year in April for Tk 6.32 crore in the year 2009-2010. They earned Tk 6.21 cr in 2008-09 fiscal year, Tk 6.20 cr in 2007-2008, and Tk 6.11 cr in 2006-2007, paying no attention to its development.

Abdul Awal Bepari, a cattle trader of the market, said their income has been reduced to almost half as a large number of their customers have chosen other markets around the capital. They are unwilling to come to this market nowadays because of its awful conditions, he added.

Bepari also said the cattle sheds, which were constructed in 1998, have outlived

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The cattle sheds say it all about how the only permanent cattle market in Gabtoli, Dhaka is doing.

BNP may not join next JS session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition BNP might abstain from the next parliament session beginning on September 7, party insiders said.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday said the government has failed to create congenial atmosphere for the opposition to return to parliament.

Delwar was talking to reporters after placing wreaths at the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman along with the newly nominated leaders of Dhaka city unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

"They [the government] are

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Fireman dies in Gazipur factory fire

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A fire-fighter was killed and seven others suffered injury yesterday while they were trying to douse a fire that broke out at a garment factory in Bhogra area of Gazipur on Thursday night.

The deceased, Abdul Kalam, 35, hailed from Netrokona, was a fireman of Kurmitola fire service. His colleagues claimed that Kalam had died from electrocution while extinguishing fire.

Rafiqul Islam, deputy assistant director of Gazipur fire service, said the fire originated from an electric short circuit on the second floor of

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