

Cabinet okays

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A team of Bangladesh delegates intialled the MoU between the governments of Bangladesh and India on cooperation in power sector during their visit to Delhi in November.

Prime minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad yesterday said, "The government will sign an agreement with Delhi on the basis of this MoU during the prime minister's visit to India in January."

"As a result of the deal, both the countries will be able to sell or buy electricity from each other depending on availability, need and price of electricity," he told The Daily Star.

Asked how Bangladesh will be able to sell power to India when the country itself is facing severe power crisis, Azad said, "This [the deal] applies to a situation when Bangladesh will have surplus power."

The deal will allow Bangladesh to import not just 100MW power as proposed earlier but 400-500MW from India in the near future. Similarly, it allows the Power Development Board to sell power to India when it has surplus electricity.

Once the agreement is signed, it will take at least two years to install equipment for connectivity between the two countries.

Officials of the two countries have identified Iswardi as the best point in Bangladesh and Baharampur in West Bengal, India, for setting up the connectivity plants within the earliest possible time.

A four-member Indian team headed by a joint secretary of the Indian power ministry arrived in Dhaka on Monday and has held meetings with the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh and the PDB.

The meetings are a follow-up to the November 18-22 visit of the Bangladesh team headed by the power secretary.

The MoU also approves a joint venture power project between the PDB and the National Thermal Power Company of India, which will allow the two national companies to jointly set up power plants in the two countries.

The MoU will also allow cooperation between the organisations to develop human resources, with the National Thermal Power Company providing technical and management training to PDB staff in plant maintenance and operation.

The cabinet yesterday also approved a proposal for formation of Agrani SME Financing Company Ltd by turning small enterprises development project into a subsidiary of Agrani Bank Ltd.

Textbooks

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of educational institutions, he said, adding that the government has made plans in such a way that the students can get their books on the first day of the academic session.

"All the books have been sent to district and upazila levels and we hope that the students will receive their books at their schools on the first day of the new year," Nahid said.

The minister said there were many obstacles, like fire in the warehouse, in the way of their initiative but they were determined to accomplish their job.

"We are happy to be able to print and send the books," he said, adding, "The students might come to their schools with empty hands but would return to their homes with new books in their hands."

Nahid said they do not want to waste a single day and that his ministry has already announced an academic calendar for all educational institutions directing them to start classes sharp on the first working day in January.

The main aim of this initiative is to reduce dropout rate as a number of students belonging to poor families cannot continue their studies due to lack of books, he said.

He, however, said there might be delay of a few days as there are many schools located in remote areas. Moreover, many school authorities would distribute the books two or three days later as they want to distribute the books amid festivity.

"These delays should not be considered as failure of the government," he hoped.

Replying to the query about the implementation of the education policy, the minister said they have taken one more week as many opinions are still pouring in.

"We would complete the entire task within January for implementing [the education policy]," he said adding that the government wants to accommodate opinions of all to finalise the education policy.

He said the main vision of the coming year is to increase the standard of education. So, the government will place emphasis on teachers, educational institutions and syllabus.

Meanwhile, the prime minister directed the authorities concerned to provide good tiffin in the schools and ensure quality of books, reports BSS.

Earlier the education minister informed the prime minister that the historic 7th March Speech of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was inserted in the Bangla book of class-8 while proclamation of Independence in Social Science book of class-8.

China pledges

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"His visit is also to inform Bangladesh about China's stance regarding the climate change issue," an official of the ministry said.

During the talks Dipu Moni said Bangladesh has drawn lessons from China's rapid economic growth in the last few decades. "Bangladesh has demonstrated steadfast support to the 'One-China Policy' advocated in favour of peaceful resolution of the issues related to Tibet and Taiwan," she added.

Dipu Moni invited Chinese investment in Bangladesh, especially in textile, agro-processing, energy and power, pharmaceuticals, communications and infrastructure development.

She also mentioned that Bangladesh would like to work with China to make the Bangladesh-Myanmar-China road link (Kunming initiative) a success.

Mentionable, China has given duty free access to 84 Bangladesh items. Hu Zhengyue informed that China would welcome a state visit of the Bangladesh prime minister to China at a mutually convenient time.

Consumers act

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at weight, price and quality of goods.

On increase of rice prices, the committee chief said they asked the commerce minister to take necessary steps immediately to keep rice prices stable.

The parliamentary body also expressed dissatisfaction over the ministry's slow pace in implementing the committee recommendations in the last one year.

Duta poll



Prof Khondoker Bazlul Hoque

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council of Duta was held at the university teachers' club yesterday. A total of 1135 teachers cast their votes from 10:00am to 2:00pm.

Out of the 15 posts, Blue panel secured eight including president, vice president, treasurer and five executive members while White panel secured seven with the posts of general secretary, joint secretary and five executive members.

Securing 551 votes, Prof Bazlul Hoque beat White panel's president candidate Prof Tasmeri SA Islam who got 538 votes. Prof Obaidul Islam won the post of general secretary securing 583 votes while his Blue Panel contestant Prof Wahiduzzaman got 504 votes.

Left leaning teachers' Pink Panel participated in the election under the banner of Blue Panel.

Prof Dalem Chandra Barman of peace and conflict department was the election commissioner.

The winners from the Blue panel are Dr Shahid Akhter Hossain of soil, water and environment department

Lottery

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Some 226 plots in two other categories other retirees and other applicants -- were announced through lotteries.

A total of 57 Purbachal and 4 Uttara plots were awarded to people under the category of other retirees while 143 Purbachal and 26 Uttara plots were allotted under the category of other applicants.

State Minister for Housing and Public Works Abdul Mannan Khan said they had given the plots to the ministers, state ministers and lawmakers following the guidelines of the immediate past caretaker government.

He said they would shortly take up the Jhilmil project but under the project flats would be distributed rather than the plots so that more people could be accommodated.

He said distribution of 22,450 Uttara Third Phase plots, 20,000 flats at Purbachal, 10,000 flats at Jhilmil project and 16,500 flats at Mirpur are underway.

Besides, the government has a plan to build four satellite cities around the capital and take up housing projects in a planned way at district, upazila and union level, the state minister said.



Prof ABM Obaidul Islam

(vice-president), Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed of economics (treasurer), and Prof Muhammad Akhtaruzzaman of Islamic history and culture, Prof Fakhruddin Alam and Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam of English, Prof Mobina Khandaker of tourism and hospitality management and Dr KM Saiful Islam Khan of Persian language and literature (executive members).

The winners from the White panel are Prof Abul Hasnat of pharmacy (joint-secretary), and Prof Abu Ahmed of economics, Prof Sadruddin of English, Prof Abul Kalam Azad of marketing, Prof Sirajul Islam of management and Associate Prof Lutfar Rahman of statistics (executive members).

With 677 votes, Prof Akhtaruzzaman secured the first position among ten executive members.

Mutiny

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Ali, nayek Md Aminul Islam, signal man Abul Kalam Azad and sepoy Azmol Hossain gave the statement among others, the court did not record depositions from six others due to their unwillingness.

The court sent the nine accused BDR men to Rangamatijail after the trial. Later, the same court sat at 3:00pm to start the trial of 75 alleged mutineers of the 9 Rifle Battalion of Marishya zone.

The court heard complainant nayek Subedar Rezaul Rahman of 9 Rifle Battalion reading out complaints and submitting related documents against the accused 75 BDR men.

The prosecutor of the case Lt Col Shamim Rahman, commanding officer of Marishya zone, also presented his complaints against them. A total of 61 witnesses will give their depositions in the case of 9 Rifle Battalion Marishya zone.

Of the 75 accused, only 17 BDR men are now in Rangamatijail.

The court adjourned the trial until 9:30 this morning. The mutiny in Rangamati took place at three of five battalions of the sector following the carnage at BDR Pikhana Headquarters. The three battalions are 12 Rifle Battalion at Rajanagar in Longdu, 9 Rifle Battalion at Marishya in Baghaichhari and 18 Rifle Battalion at Chhotohorina in Barkal upazila.

Titas rings crisis bell

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Besides, Titas would reduce gas supply to Siddhirganj power plant to save eight million cubic feet of gas a day. As per contract between Titas and the power plant, the plant was supposed to receive 25 million cubic feet of gas a day but it actually gets 33 million cubic feet a day. This additional gas can be diverted to Narayanganj.

Titas would also stop gas supply to the gas-fired NEPC Barge-mounted power plant and divert that gas to general consumers. This plant was supposed to be installed with a dual-fuel system last year so that it can operate on petroleum as well as natural gas.

Titas will reduce gas supply to the Ghorashal Fertiliser Factory too and divert that gas to Dhaka.

The area under Titas's network has a demand of 1,650 million cubic feet of gas a day but it provides only 1,440 million cubic feet a day. The country's total gas consumption presently is around 2,000 million cubic feet a day.

The country faces additional gas shortage during winter as gas transmission pipelines become narrow with the accumulation of condensate (a liquid gas by-product) due to low temperature. But this year this crisis has become very acute triggering public outcry in different places.

A top Titas official said the company would launch a gas pipeline survey in areas where supply crisis has become acute.

At the meeting yesterday, Titas officials discussed the discontent among people in

Munshiganj. To improve gas supply to Munshiganj, they decided to install a District Regulating Station there. A new gas pipeline will be installed to increase gas flow near the station at Mazdair.

Responding to the demand of Shyampur locals, Titas committed to replace all narrow gas pipelines in that area. At the same time it will snap all illegal and unpaid for gas connections in Shyampur. A large number of commercial enterprises illegally consume huge volume of gas in that area.

"This winter, consumption in the Titas area has jumped up by 40 million cubic feet of gas a day. This is because people use gas burners more, compared to summer time, for heating water and even for warming up their rooms," said the high official, adding, "We need to make people aware of the best use of gas and how to not waste."

The company would also request the government to take initiatives to make available Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) containers in parts of the city where gas crisis is acute. This would help people cook conveniently.

For the long run, Titas is planning to develop a gas storage facility in the city for emergency supply during the winter.

Similar gas-load management was introduced in Pakistan where gas crisis is even worse, sources said. Pakistan's gas supply shortfall is almost 1,000 million cubic feet a day this month, says a report of Pakistani daily Don.

BNP ready for talks

Moudud on JS return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Allocation of one more front-row seat to the main opposition BNP in parliament is in no way enough to bring it back to the House, BNP Standing Committee member Moudud Ahmed said yesterday.

"BNP's return to parliament depends on the settlement of a number of issues that include ensuring security of BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia and withdrawal of cases against her and Tarique Rahman," he told reporters after placing a wreath at the grave of party's founder Ziaur Rahman on the occasion of the founding anniversary of Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal.

"The ruling party chose the path of conflict with the main opposition instead of reconciliation," said Moudud.

The BNP leader said if the government really wants the main opposition to return to parliament, it has to resolve the problems.

He said they are eager to return to the House but the ruling party is out to spoil the atmosphere there.

"The government must sit with the opposition to settle the issues and we are ready to hold talks," Moudud said.

The fourth session of the ninth parliament begins on January 4. Speaker Abdul Hamid recently said he might take initiative for allocation of one more front-row seat to the main opposition, if BNP places a proposal on it in the House.

BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan and Rafiqul Islam Mia, senior joint secretary general and Krishak Dal acting president Mirza Fakhruddin Alamgir, joint secretary general Aman Ullah Aman, Krishak Dal general secretary Shamsuzzaman Dudu were present.

5 injured

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yard authorities did not allow anyone inside.

Sources said the accident occurred at newly built yard Unique Traders, owned by SM Al Mamun, son of local Awami League lawmaker ABM Abul Kashem Matar.

Al Mamun or his father could not be reached over phone after repeated attempts.

On February 19, Department of Forest (DoF) filed a case with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court accusing 13 people, including Al Mamun, in connection with felling trees along the coastal belt of Sonachhari to build the ship-breaking yard Unique Traders.

However, police submitted the final report sparing the accused in the case prompting the DoF to file a Naraji petition before the Magistrate court, said sources in the DoF.

The DoF later moved to the District Session's Court of Chittagong where it remains pending till date, added the sources.

Earlier on Saturday, an explosion at Rahim Steel and Ship-breaking Yard in Sitakunda claimed lives of four workers and injured 13 others. So far at least 18 people have died in ship-breaking mishaps this year while 18 were killed in 2006 and 2007 and 15 in 2008.

31st night

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United Hospital and Natun Bazar.

Of the intersections surrounding Dhaka University, only those at Shahbagh, the Old High Court, Dhaka Medical Emergency Gate and Nilkhet may be used.

DMP commissioner AKM Shahidul Hoque warned that persons caught driving under the influence of alcohol or using their mobile phones will be arrested.

Shahidul said that young drivers are the most likely to engage in this type of behaviour and are therefore the most at risk of being involved in an accident over the New Year period.

The DMP has also banned the use of explosives and firecrackers.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) will deploy 3,000 additional personnel on New Year's Eve, including 37 strike teams and 106 check-posts.

The commissioner added that the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) will assist police by deploying an additional 2,000 personnel in Dhaka and another 3,000 in areas outside the capital.

Fire at India's nuke centre kills 2

AP, Mumbai

A fire broke out in a chemical laboratory at India's main nuclear research facility Tuesday, killing at least two people, an official said.

The fire was extinguished within 45 minutes at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre on the outskirts of Mumbai, India's financial and entertainment capital, the centre's spokesman, SK Malhotra, said in a statement.

"It may be noted that no nuclear reactor, radioactivity or radiation is involved in the accident," Malhotra said.

Police were investigating the cause of the fire, he said. Fire-fighters found two bodies charred beyond recognition in a third-floor room of the modular laboratory, he said.

The Bhabha centre has a number of nuclear reactors and the research involves both nuclear weapons and nuclear power. It was set up in 1954 and named after a top Indian scientist, Homi J Bhabha.

The fire occurred on a day Japan's new prime minister offered to consider selling nuclear power technology to India despite differences over signing a test ban treaty.

Energy-starved India is interested in wooing Japan's thriving nuclear power industry, but Tokyo has so far not allowed Japanese companies to do business in nuclear

reactors and fuels until New Delhi agrees to stop conducting nuclear tests.

In New Delhi, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama told reporters that his government would examine the matter following assurances by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that India would not divert any imports from Japan for weapons purposes or to third countries.

"The two prime ministers shared the view that nuclear energy can play an important role as a safe, sustainable and non-polluting source of energy in meeting the rising global energy demands," said a joint statement.

India has so far rejected calls for it to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, but a US nuclear accord with India last year reversed more than three decades of US policy barring the sale of nuclear fuel and technology to India since its first atomic test in 1974.

Singh stressed that India has unilaterally declared a moratorium on nuclear testing. Its last test was in 1998.

India currently has 17 civilian nuclear reactors. It gets just 3 percent of its energy from nuclear power. It plans to increase its nuclear capacity to 63,000 megawatts by 2030 from 4,120 megawatts today.

Fake currency

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Fake notes worth around Tk 1.5 crore put by them in circulation are still in the market.

Maj Haque suspects that international gangs might have connection with the local syndicate. Replying to a query he however said the equipment and raw materials used in forging notes are available in local market.

Rab sources said the gang was capable of printing Tk 50, Tk 100, Tk 500 and Tk 1000 notes worth Tk 10 lakh a day. They recently have developed the technology to make the fake notes as strong as the real ones.

Rab members also found huge amount of papers to print notes, half-printed forged notes, one computer monitor and two CPUs, three colour printers and several scanning machines.

"We have also seized some embossers and computer software needed for making Indian notes," Maj Haque said.

Rab said the busting of the forgery factory is an outcome of three months of investigation by the Rapid Action Battalion members who contacted with the syndicate to purchase Tk 10 lakh counterfeit notes in exchange of Tk 2 lakh.

Rab said apprehending

the arrest, the gang used to shift residences every three months and use pseudonyms.

Maj Haque said, "The amount of fake currency notes seized from the market in different times suggests that a number of gangs are active in this illegal business."

THE FORGERY GANG
The two arrestees, now under intensive interrogation, disclosed to the elite force members that they had also a plan to forge Indian notes.

Zahurul hailing from Charghat in Rajshahi passed diploma from Government Commercial Institute in Rangpur in 2003 and then worked at the Proshika, an NGO, for four years.

He admitted to Rab that he got involved in the illegal business through their ringleader Rana in 2008.

The syndicate led by Rana has around 50 members in three groups -- general workers, team leaders and suppliers, Rab sources said.

They added the gang worked so secretly that even their neighbours did not know anything about their clandestine activities.

Gas dearth

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Rahman said, "Yesterday I had to wait until 11:00pm before I could cook my dinner because the gas went off at 10:00am."

Many dwellers in the problem areas have reportedly purchased mud ovens or kerosene oil to overcome the gas shortages.

Shahadat Hossain, a resident of Moghbazar, said, "Last month we bought a mud stove but it is very difficult to run as well as being time-consuming."

General Manager (Operations) of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited Md Khalid Hasan said that during the winter the demand for gas increases and that existing supplies are unable to cope.

Around 1600 million cubic feet of gas is consumed each day during the winter in Dhaka, with a daily shortfall of around 100 to 150 million cubic feet.

Khalid said that the lack of a proper gas transmission system is contributing to the problem, particularly in Demra, Joydevpur, Ashulia and Aminbazar.

He said that gas shortages in Dhaka could be resolved immediately if a compressor was installed in Ashuganj.

Khalid said that compressors should also be installed in Alenga and Muchai to resolve the nation-wide gas crisis.

Khalid added that it is vital for authorities to increase gas production and improve the network system, particularly in Mirpur.

"Larger gas networks must be set up and old pipelines replaced," he said.

Indian HC remark

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cabinet told The Daily Star yesterday.

Referring to the deployment of US marine soldiers at its embassy in Dhaka, UK High Commission's Special Air Service (SAS)--Special Forces regiment within the British Army, and German embassy's personnel security deployment, the members told the meeting that India could also deploy its own security personnel at its high commission and the concerned minister should know about it.

The ministers also told the meeting that Bangladesh has also deployed its own security personnel at its high commissions including in India and London.

Press Trust of India recently reported that India will soon deploy its para-military troops to guard its mission in Dhaka as it is facing threat from terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The report said at least 50 specially trained troops of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), a force that guards Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders, will soon be sent to guard the high commission after getting a clearance from its external affairs ministry.

The home minister on December 28 told journalists that she did not know anything about the presence of 'Indian forces' which will be brought to provide extra security to the Indian High Commission premises in Dhaka.

"I hear this for the first time from you. My ministry is not aware about this," Sahara told the journalists.

Meanwhile, hours after the cabinet meeting, the home minister dismissed the media reports on deployment of India's own security personnel at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka as completely false, fabricated and baseless.

"A vested quarter is trying to create smokescreen," she told journalists at the Directorate of Prisons after a meeting with the prison officials there yesterday.

She said her government has been successful in maintaining law and order and hoped that this trend would continue in the future.

About celebration of the 31st night to welcome the New Year (2010), she warned of taking stern action against those who would create chaos at clubs or hotels.

Forgers thrive

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already in the market, which is the same size as a Tk 100 note. Forgers whiten Tk 100 notes using chemical substances and through a scanner they put a Tk 500 note on it. After the notes are printed they are photocopied.

BB data shows that it has recorded nearly 4,000 cases of forged notes. The central bank's eight regional offices file around 50 cases of fake notes a month on average.

Fake notes continue to flood the markets, as it is a lucrative business. Even the provision of death sentence has failed to reduce the number of the counterfeit notes.

"The number of cases detected would be much higher if the banks filed cases regularly," a senior BB official said. A cashier at an old branch of the state-owned Sonali Bank in the capital said: "We are afraid of filing cases as we have to spend both money and time and face police hassles for filing a case."

Clock returns

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authorities concerned to take all measures so that people do not have to suffer due to time change, meeting sources said.

The cabinet on December 24 decided to keep the Bangladesh Standard Time until March 31 next year.

On March 31, the clock would be put forward again by an hour from 11:59pm as part of daylight saving measures and will continue till 11:59pm of October 31.

On October 31 midnight, the clock would be pushed back to 10:59pm from 11:59pm to set the GMT plus 6 hours timing.

Earlier, the cabinet approved the decision to implement DST on June 2 and it first came into effect on June 19, when the clocks went forward one hour.

The power-saving measure was taken in the wake of nagging power crisis in the country and the government claims that 200-megawatt of electricity has been saved due to introduction of DST.

Sources said Bangladesh Biman and Bangladesh Railway have already taken necessary measures so that people do not face any problems due to time change.