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The power-rush

Government hopes to sign 1,000MW electricity deals in a month; PM targets 500MW import from India by 2012

SHARIER KHAN

Rushing to make up for the country's power deficit, the government is reportedly poised to sign up to 10 contracts by May 31 to eventually deliver up to 1,000MW power--enough to light up half of the populous capital city.

A top official of the Power Development Board, who requested anonymity, said the deals are the first of more than a dozen projects the government hopes to sign within a

year to generate in all 5,700MW power. These include two very large coal-fired power plants in Khulna and Chittagong.

Most of these projects would take almost three years to complete--except for the two large coal power plants, which will begin operation in early 2015. But nearly a 1,000MW would be pumped into the national grid within a year, significantly easing the ongoing power crisis.

The contracts will require more than a \$5 billion investment.

In three years, the move will cover the power gap including the anticipated growth in demand.

At a ceremony to lay the foundation stone for a 150MW in Chandpur yesterday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said her government will try to import electricity through regional cooperation with countries throughout Asia.

"The present government has taken effective steps to import electricity on an urgent basis from India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China," the UNB quoted her as saying.

"We are aware of your sufferings," she said about frequent power cuts. "Let me assure you this government will not leave any stone unturned to increase power and gas production."

Economist Zaid Bakht predicted that if the government is successful pushing through the contracts, it could revive the smaller scale industries now hard hit by the power crisis.

"But for large industries, increasing natural gas supplies is very important," said Bakht. "Due to gas crisis,

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TOXIC PARACETAMOL CASE

Cops take 8 months to say Rid bosses hiding

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Police took more than eight months to submit a report before the Drug Court that three Rid Pharmaceuticals officials charged with manufacturing adulterated paracetamol syrup are absconding.

Brahmanbaria police yesterday placed the report on execution of arrest warrants against the three, ignoring the court warning nine times since the case was filed. The court had said non-submission of the report was delaying the trial process.

Upon receipt of the report, Judge Mohammad Abdul Majid of the Drug Court asked authorities concerned to publish adver-

tisements in two Bangla dailies asking the three officials to appear before it by May 26.

As per law, if the accused fail to comply with the court order, the trial against them will continue in their absence, the court said.

After passing such a long time, police in their report mentioned that they had failed to arrest the absconding three as the Rid's office remains closed and the accused did not live adjacent to the office.

On August 11 last year, five officials of the company were charged in a case for producing adulterated paracetamol syrup that caused the death of 28 children across the country from June to August last year.

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Farmers try to salvage whatever Boro paddy is left, after the fields have been inundated by water from overflowing Dumni canal in Khilkhet of the capital. Inset, portion of the canal filled up by Rajuk for constructing a 300-foot wide road, causing the blockage of the area's sole drainage.

Filled up canal leads to Boro paddy loss

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Boro paddy on several hundred acres of land has been almost destroyed as Rajuk filled up a centuries-old natural canal blocking drainage in vast low lying areas of Khilkhet in the capital.

Local people said that amid strong opposition from them, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakha (Rajuk) filled up the canal -- Dumni Khal -- two months ago for building a 300-foot wide road connecting Purbachal New Town with the city. This has led to waterlogging in four villages and low-lying lands in Khilkhet area.

They alleged that waterlogging has destroyed their paddy weeks before the harvest, and they cannot retrieve anything other than hay from the paddy fields.

Dozens of farmers were seen in the fields under waist-deep water on Saturday desperately trying to reap whatever they could.

Pointing their fingers at the sand-filled portion of Dumni Khal, they said flow of the canal has been totally blocked, and water rushing in from upstream has nowhere to go.

Mokarram Hossain, a farmer from Dumni village, said the canal has existed for centuries, and it serves as the only drainage facility in the area. Many other farmers echoed his views.

Meanwhile, several real estate developers have also embarked on filling up Dumni Khal. Originating from the Balu river in the north, the canal winds its way through Dumni, Mostul, Dhalna, Tolna, Khadaldia and Gajaria areas before rejoining the Balu in the south 15 km away.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Change in political culture the answer

Powerful EC not enough for fair polls

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Bhola-3 by-poll brought to the surface the ugliness of the country's intolerant political culture once again, after a pause of over three years.

The lesson learnt from this by-poll is that taking "foolproof measures" and use of all good offices by the Election Commission might also eventually fall flat on the face, unless political parties shun their penchant for using muscle, and conjure some respect for voters' mandate.

The way the by-poll was held, also raised questions to some extent about ruling Awami League's sincerity about establishing a credible electoral system by strengthening the democratic institutions, as promised in its electoral manifesto.

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SEE EDITORIAL FOR MORE

Bhola calms down

AL, BNP continue blame game; EC declares Shawon winner

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN, from Lalmohan

Normality is returning to Bhola-3 constituency after the Saturday's by-polls amid a few stray incidents of post-polls violence.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday declared ruling Awami League candidate Nurunnabi Chowdhury Shawon the official winner of the by-election.

Returning Officer (RO) of Bhola Nuruzzaman Talukder in a programme declared Shawon victorious at Bhola district council office around 12:00noon.

Though both the AL and BNP candidates were invited at the result announcement programme, none of them showed up.

Defeated BNP candidate Maj (ret) Hafizuddin Ahmed blamed the ruling AL activists for the violence and alleged they even raped wife and daughter of his worker in Char Umed in Lalmohan.

Locals however said it was not a rape but admitted that a woman and her daughter were assaulted by AL musclemen.

Police say they are investigating the matter seriously and will take action if the allegation is proved to be true.

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31 BANGLADESHI SEAMEN

Benin assures of repatriation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Benin authorities have assured Bangladesh of their assistance in repatriating 31 Bangladeshi seamen stranded offshore the West African country.

"We urged them for humanitarian assistance to the stranded seamen. They said they would help to bring them onshore," said Saïda Muna Tasneem, director general of the External Publicity Wing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

The assertion came after Bangladesh's

charge d' affaires in Morocco Mohammad Lutfar Raham contacted the Benin mission there, she said adding that Lutfar will be moving to Benin in a day or two.

Meanwhile, the stranded seamen in Benin said though they have food they are running short of gas and oil to cook.

"We had dry bread for lunch today (April 25). We are trying to get some coal in the ship to cook," said Ashraf Alam, chief officer of the ship MT Paloma. Nine Bangladeshi crewmembers are on board the ship.

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BNP plans protests over Bhola

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP will hold protest rallies in all city corporations and district headquarters on Wednesday demanding cancellation of Bhola-3 by-poll results and resignation of chief election commissioner and his two deputies.

The announcement came from Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, member of BNP national standing committee, at a rally in the capital's Muktangan. The party's Dhaka city unit organised it to protest the alleged irregularities and vote rigging in the by-poll.

From the protest rallies, the party will also demand immediate solution to the ongoing electricity and gas crises across the country.

BNP leaders alleged that the Bhola-3 by-poll was stage-managed and rigged. They said the Awami League government is trying to "establish BAKSAL in the guise of a democratic character."

The trio -- the government, Election Commission and Awami League plundered votes in the Bhola-3 by-

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