

Fuel price hike

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Ahmed Runjib, Chowdhury Redwan-e-Khuda and Shoyeb Uddin Khan -- challenging the government's decision made on November 10 to increase the prices of fuel by Tk 5 per litre.

Secretary to the power and energy ministry, chairmen of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission and Petrobangla have been made respondent to the rule.

The lawyers filed the petition as public interest litigation on November 29 saying that the government increased the fuel price on November 10 violating the rules of Energy Regulatory Commission Act-2003.

As per rules of the act, the price of fuel cannot be increased more than once in a fiscal year, and the government has to issue a notice at least 90 days before increasing fuel prices, the petitioners said.

But the government increased the price of fuel violating the rules, as it had already increased the fuel price earlier on September 18 this year, they added.

The petitioners prayed to the court to issue a rule upon the government to explain why the price hike should not be declared illegal.

After holding hearing on the petition, the HC bench of Justice Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Md Khurshid Alam Sarker issued the rule.

Hasan Mohammad Reyad appeared for the petitioners.

Rumana

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No injury marks were identified on the body during an autopsy, said Dr Shafiquzzaman of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

However, there were marks of handcuffs on his wrists. "We have sent the viscera report to the forensic chemical laboratory in Mohakhali to ascertain the cause of his death," he added.

Police arrested Sumon on June 15 after a case was filed against him on June 6 with Dhanmondi Police Station for torturing Rumana, an assistant professor of Department of International Relations at DU.

Rumana, also a post-graduate student at University of British Columbia in Canada, lost her eyesight permanently after Sumon allegedly pushed his fingers into her eyes at her parents' house on June 5.

The victim was taken to India and Canada for treatment, but doctors in both the countries failed to recover her eyesight.

The brutal incident triggered shock and widespread condemnation in the country.

The incident ultimately led her to divorce Sumon.

Holy Ashura

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world as a symbol of 'sacrifice and mourning' recalling the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain Ibn Ali (RA), a grandson of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM), in the battle of Karbala on Muharram 10 around 1331 years ago.

In the historic battle, Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) along with his family members and 72 followers braced martyrdom at the hands of the soldiers of Yazid in Hijri 61 while fighting for establishing justice in society.

The word Ashura means simply 'tenth' in Arabic, and therefore the name of the remembrance, literally translated, means 'the tenth day'.

In his message, President Zillur Rahman called upon all to resist injustices in our national life and establish truth and justice reflecting the great teachings of Holy Ashura.

Hasina in a similar message also called upon all to raise their voice against injustices and establish truth and justice reflecting the great sacrifice of Karbala.

New ministers

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and sincerity.

They were speaking at separate press conferences at the Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre.

On the other hand, Faruk Khan, till recently commerce minister, said he would be able to efficiently discharge his new assignment as civil aviation minister.

Talking to reporters, he claimed he had run the commerce ministry successfully.

SURANJIT SENGUPTA

Veteran AL leader Suranjit said maintaining the timetable of trains would be his first challenge, with ensuring clean train services being the second.

Asked if a further reshuffle of the cabinet was in the works, he said, "Don't you get any signal from the recent reshuffle in the cabinet? You had better wait if you want to see more surprises."

On his new job, Suranjit said, "People will get huge benefits if we can maintain the train schedule. Besides, people will be attracted if we can offer neat and clean train service."

Replying to a query on the sufferings faced by people in buying tickets, he said he would try to digitise the ticketing system. "Passengers' woes will lessen to a great extent if we can do that."

Turning meter gauze rail line into broad gauge and those of broad gauge into electric line will be another test, said Suranjit.

Pointing to the loss in the sector, he said Bangladesh was the only country in the world to have incurred loss. "I want to see where the problem is, where and how the 'black cat' remains hiding in the dark."

The sector got a new life through being separated

from the communications ministry, he added.

Terming the potential in railway "huge", he said the sector gets aid and loan from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

He, however, said his job would be a challenging one, given that he would get only two years in office.

"Maybe I won't be able to complete all these tasks. The prime minister has assigned me out of her belief in me, and I'll try my best to perform my job with honesty and sincerity."

OBAIDULQUADER

Obaidul Quader said construction of the Padma bridge would not be completed in the remaining two years of the government, but his main focus is to start the construction.

"I don't want to make big promises. I want to start my task on priority basis."

Asked when he planned to begin the construction, he said, "I don't want to mention a time and date on any matter. I'll prove myself through my work."

On the differences between the government and the World Bank over funding the project, Obaidul said: "Let me start the job. I'll be able to make a comment on the issue after assessing all the related matters."

Also terming his job challenging, he said he would face those challenges with honesty and sincerity.

Replying to another query, he said, "Earlier on many occasions I talked about public issues. But people do not want to hear good words from a minister. They want better performance. We should speak less and work more."

Khmer Rouge

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"Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, seen as the chief ideologue of the brutal 1970s movement, was the first of three accused to face questioning from judges in the proceedings.

"I don't want the next generations to misunderstand the history. I don't want them to misunderstand that the Khmer Rouge are bad people, are criminals. Nothing is true about that," the bespectacled 85-year-old told the court.

Nuon Chea and his co-defendants -- former foreign minister Ieng Sary and ex-head of state Khieu Samphan -- all deny charges of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

Led by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied cities, abolished money and religion and wiped out nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population through starvation, overwork or execution in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.

The regime was eventually ousted from the capital by Vietnamese forces.

Nuon Chea cast himself as a nationalist defending his nation from Vietnamese aggressors who "always attempted to swallow Cambodian territory" and blamed the neighbouring country for the many deaths during the Khmer Rouge period.

"It was Vietnam who killed Cambodians," the unrepentant revolutionary said.

Pol Pot's right-hand man also pointed the finger at rogue elements, or "bandits", who had infiltrated the Khmer Rouge before the headline communist group came to power.

Khmer Rouge survivors at the court were dismissive of Nuon Chea's version of the past.

All destroyed

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observed Tofail Ahmed, one of the dozens of the country's politicians.

The parties have also failed to uphold democracy and run the country in line with the spirit of 1990 mass movement, the veteran Awami League leader told The Daily Star.

"At present, there is no ideology in politics as the political parties are driven by greed for power and money and thus the spirit of the democratic upheaval of 1990 against deposed military dictator HM Ershad has been destroyed," lamented Tofail.

After the fall of Ershad's autocratic regime, we drew fresh inspiration to build a conflict-free democratic society, he maintained. "But our dream to build a prosperous and wealthy nation has been shattered as bad politics has been destroying our achievements over the last 20 years."

He also deplored the fact that politics has become a money-making vocation.

"Political parties give priority to their self interests rather than giving importance to their respective ideology," mentioned Tofail, one of the key political leaders in the anti-Ershad movement.

The former minister also said though different parties have different ideology, all the major political parties could unite in 1990 for the greater interest of the country. "But after 1990, we never could unite which is one of our major failures."

He, however, claimed that most of the pledges made in the 1990 framework of the three alliances have been materialised.

The AL-led 15 party, BNP-led seven-party and left-leaning five-party alliances had signed a historic framework on November 19, 1990 to force the military dictator resign and introduce a democratic rule in the country.

All those signatories pledged to repeal the Special Powers Act, 1974 and give autonomy to Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar.

Pledges were also made to separate judiciary from the executive branch of the government and allow complete independence to it to ensure rule of law.

The three alliances also pledged to strengthen local governments of all the administrative units and run them by elected representatives with full autonomy.

Carbon emissions

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Research at the University of East Anglia, and an author of the research, said the data showed that little had been achieved in the past two decades in reducing the risks from climate change.

"There have been efforts to use more renewable energy and improve energy efficiency but what this shows is that so far, the effects have been marginal," she said. "We need to do something about the 80 percent of energy that still comes from burning fossil fuels."

She said the problem was urgent, as the chances of holding global temperature rises to less than 2C above pre-industrial levels (which scientists regard as the limit of safety) beyond which climate change becomes catastrophic and irreversible, were dependent on emissions peaking by 2020 at the latest.

Governments meeting in Durban this week are focusing on a new treaty that, if it can be achieved, would not come into force until 2020. "That would be too late, unless strong actions are taken in the meantime," said Le Quéré.

Some governments and policy advisers have been advocating a different approach to the climate negotiations, suggesting

that a system of voluntary reductions in emissions undertaken by national governments and industries could be more effective than a "top-down" global treaty. But this so-called "bottom up" approach did not appear to be working currently, Le Quéré said, as efforts to cut emissions so far had made little impact outside Europe, where emissions have been successfully reduced.

The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal Nature Climate Change, found that global carbon emissions were likely to carry on increasing at a rate of about 3 percent per year. It was accompanied by another study offering new proof that climate change is linked to human activities, in burning fossil fuel.

Prof Chris Rapley, professor of Climate Science at University College London, said: "These two new results offer a stark message. Human carbon emissions are certainly disturbing the climate system upon which we depend, and in spite of the economic slowdown, and despite all the efforts by governments, businesses and people to reduce them, our emissions are reaching new highs. The climatic consequences, already emerging, will grow over time, and are irreversible."

Dreams come untrue

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nine-year rule of the dictator. The international community praised the courage, commitment and sacrifice of the Bengali nation for the establishment of democracy.

The three alliances in November 1990 also declared a code of conduct for their component parties to uphold the spirit and objectives of the War of Independence and to establish genuine democracy by forcing Ershad, his cronies and their corrupt policies from power.

According to the agreed code of conduct, the three alliances promised that Ershad would not be accommodated by any of the parties. The alliances also promised to show respect to each other's political views and demonstrate mutual tolerance. They also pledged to refrain from political mudslinging and not question the patriotism and religious belief of others.

People across the spectrum placed their trust in the historic declaration and the code of conduct and stood behind the leadership of the three alliances. Ershad had to submit to the violent mass upsurge and announce his resignation.

The announcement spread like wildfire, sending tens of thousands of cheering crowds on to the streets of Dhaka and other cities to celebrate their victory against injustice, falsehood, corruption and dictatorial rule. It was Bangladesh's second biggest celebration after the nation's victory in the Liberation War on December 16, 1971.

The earliest sign of a crack in this rare political unity was seen when BNP nominated at the 1991 election at least two former bureaucrats who had been close to Ershad.

Soon after the election, the Awami League adopted a stance that saw further cracks in the unity. In the polls BNP emerged as the single largest party, but fell short of 151 seats in the 300-member parliament to form a government on its own.

The formation of the government was delayed as BNP failed in its unofficial bid to get support from the AL and its allies.

In a desperate bid to take office BNP then begged and got support from the Jamaat-e-Islami, conveniently forgetting its commitment to upholding the spirit of the War of Liberation.

Then BNP gave Freedom Party spearheaded by the killers of Bangabandhu a free hand to counter the AL on the streets. The AL, on the other hand, backed the Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee to strengthen

public opinion against the anti-liberation forces.

The bitterness continued to grow and people's hopes for a conflict-free political regime began evaporating. Parliament witnessed frequent boycotts and walk-outs by the opposition.

Following severe rigging in a by-election in Magura in 1994, the bitterness between the two main parties became so severe that the AL MPs resigned from parliament en masse and waged a movement for a caretaker government.

The period 1995-early 1996 was overshadowed by non-stop hartals, violence and hopelessness as the AL stood firm in its demand for a caretaker government while BNP remained determined to hold election under its governance.

In February 1996, BNP went ahead with a one-party election but could not sustain the government as there was no public support for it. The BNP finally agreed to make room for a caretaker government to oversee elections.

Ironically the tables have now turned. The AL is now firm about holding elections on its watch, while the BNP has threatened to boycott the next election if a caretaker government is not formed.

After the 1996 general election, Awami League formed its cabinet through horse trading with Ershad and his party. As part of the deal Awami League had to induct Ershad's cronies albeit those widely known for their corruption while in power into Sheikh Hasina's cabinet.

By then politicians like Moudud Ahmed or AKM Mosharraf Hossain who were blacklisted for their proximity to Ershad were being rehabilitated in BNP as well.

In 1998, the BNP formed an alliance with Ershad although that did not last long.

The dreams of the people had already shattered by then. Following the 2001 election, the AL rejected the polls result and BNP this time went for an offensive strategy.

Quite contrary to the three alliances' understanding, BNP's tilt towards anti-liberation forces became loud and clear after 2001. This also paved way for extremist Islamist groups to establish a reign of terror through grenade attacks on AL and pro-liberation groups. This time the rightists with help from some top BNP leaders were trying to eliminate the AL leadership.

By the time the 2006 elections came, the two main parties were racing with each other to drag Ershad on their

"A new level of decisive action is required now to achieve real emissions reductions. World leaders at the climate negotiations at Durban know the score; the opportunity to act consistently with their responsibilities and rank lies before them. We can only hope that they rise to the challenge."

Julia Steinberger, lecturer in ecological economics at the Sustainability Research Institute, University of Leeds, said the research showed that even the recession had barely made a dent on the rise in greenhouse gas emissions.

She said: "The worst economic crisis in decades was apparently a mere hiccup in terms of carbon emissions: a temporary drop for the richest countries in 2009, and hardly perceived by emerging economies. These findings are truly shocking, and constitute a global wake-up call."

"The economic crisis should have been an opportunity to invest in low-carbon infrastructure for the 21st century. Instead, we fostered a lose-lose situation: carbon emissions rocketing to unprecedented levels, alongside increases in joblessness, energy costs and income disparities. Surely the transition to a green economy has never seemed more appealing."

side. The BNP initially constituted the four-party alliance with Ershad's Jatiya Party but later he deserted the alliance.

And this time, the nation saw how BNP remained hell bent to manipulate the election through forming a puppet caretaker government and election commission. The end result was a two-year military backed caretaker government regime where the political parties faced severe backlashes from the army.

When the stage was set for the December 2008 elections, everyone was hopeful about some qualitative changes in politics given the experience of the military-backed caretaker government.

This hope lingered despite the fact that at the 2008 elections, the AL formed a grand alliance with Ershad and other left and right wing groups.

But after the current government was installed through professing a 'charter of change' the nation has observed that nothing has changed. The two major parties have revived their mutual hatred and distrust in full swing and are busy shaping whatever strategies they need to stay in power. That includes AL's scrapping of the caretaker government system and BNP's support for anti-liberation forces.

All the while corruption has remained with subsequent governments, the same as in Ershad's government.

The people's expectations for a society free of conflict and corruption remain a far cry.

Formal war

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M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman and Abdul Quader Molla -- by December 5.

The three-member tribunal headed by its Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq deferred the date following Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo's prayer for more time to submit the charges.

We have almost prepared the formal charges and are hopeful that we will be able to submit them within a short period of time, said Tipoo.

The jail authorities produced the accused Jamaat leaders before the tribunal yesterday morning.

The court directed the jail authorities to produce the detained leaders before it again on December 11.

Barrister Abdur Razzaq, chief counsel for the accused leaders, told reporters that the prosecutors had 18 months time to submit formal charges against his clients so the defence also needs 18 months to defend the accused.

Nanak moves

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The government would try to solve the accommodation problem and would strengthen the zonal offices to ensure quality service.

The problems have been generated over the years and have gone unaddressed. Now measures will be taken to solve those gradually but that will take time, Nanak continued.

Surprisingly, the leaders in the meeting did not raise any demand against the split though the DCC split had triggered their movement.

The state minister urged DCC employees and officials to be united and dedicated to ensuring quality service. He also warned those, who neglect their duties, of stern actions.

Convener of the Samannay Parishad Mesbaul Karim and member secretary Abdul Latif, among others, addressed the meeting.

Administrator of Dhaka South City Corporation Khalilur Raman took his charge yesterday while the administrator of Dhaka North City Corporation, Khorshed Alam Chowdhury, is now abroad and will take charge tomorrow, said secretary of local government division Abu Alam Mohammad Shahid Khan.

Quader

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status of a minister while Obaidul Quader had been a state minister in Hasina's first cabinet.

In another significant change, Commerce Minister Mohammad Faruk Khan and Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader swapped their portfolios.

Yesterday's move came amid an outcry for a change in Hasina's relatively inexperienced cabinet that has been damaging her party's image. Various quarters have been demanding removal of the ministers who became unpopular for their inefficiency or controversial activities.

There had also been a demand from within the Awami League for inducting some experienced politicians who were kept aside when Hasina formed her cabinet with 31 members -- 23 ministers and eight state ministers -- after the landslide victory in the 2008 general elections.

Syed Abul Hossain drew huge flak after the World Bank (WB) brought corruption allegation against him and suspended its \$ 1.2 billion loan for the \$ 2.9 billion Padma Bridge three months ago. His failure in repairing and maintaining the country's roads and highways also seem to have contributed to his losing the charge of the communications ministry.

Thrown in an awkward situation by WB's fund suspension, some government officials insisted in vain that it would not be a problem to manage the fund from alternative sources and that they would be able to convince the WB that no corruption had taken place in the bridge project. However, the government is yet to be successful in either of the two schemes.

With Abul's removal, many now think that the main barrier in the Padma Bridge construction has been eliminated.

Meanwhile, former commerce minister Faruk Khan earned strong criticism of the people for failing to rein in the skyrocketing prices of commodities which caused tremendous sufferings, especially to the low-income people.

GM Quader, a lawmaker from Jatiya Party, will now deal with the politically sensitive issue of commodity prices. He has been undergoing through an uncomfortable relationship for quite some time between his ministry and the authorities of the national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

At the fag end of the government's third year in power, the PM expanded her cabinet on November 28 by incorporating two party stalwarts Suranjit Sengupta and Obaidul Quader as full ministers. The status of state minister for environment and forest Hasan Mahmud was also upgraded to that of a minister.

The number of ministries has now risen to 39 while the number of ministers and state ministers to 48.

Well-placed sources in the ruling party said the government is planning to split few more ministries to incorporate new faces in Hasina's cabinet. The PM will take final decision in this regard on her return from Myanmar.