

Mixed bag of bold steps

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immediately end the mechanism which was evolved, at their insistence and long drawn out agitation, to ensure fair and acceptable elections under a neutral caretaker government some two decades ago.

The cancellation and the swiftness with which it was done have also caused deep anxiety in the public mind about whether the BNP and its allies would join an election held under a political government and, if they do not join, how acceptable a one-sided election would be.

The year led to worries about the economic future too. A nagging double-digit inflation for a long period of 10 months has frayed the nerves of the common people. As figures clearly show, people had to use up their savings to eke out a living. Domestic economic mismanagement defined by high borrowing, high subsidy and high import bill because of costly fuel import to generate electricity has as much to be blamed as the international price situation.

To reduce subsidy, the government had to repeatedly increase fuel and electricity prices. And only the future will tell as to what extent this will burden consumers who might not even see a modest pay rise against the backdrop of the global economic meltdown. And predictions about fuel prices are now varied, creating new tension. The global gloom should pull it down. But the uncertainty arising out of Iran's threat to block the Straits of Hormuz and the Arab unrest throw up a troubling picture.

Investment is another crucial area that lagged behind in the past year with the energy crisis being the main reason. Whether investment will pick up this

year depends more on political stability.

To add to the political unease is the impending changeover in the election commission. The whole of last year was wasted without giving much thought to passing a law on how to form a commission. All eyes are now fixed on it as the president has initiated talks with the political parties on the appointment of the chief election commissioner and his deputies. The outcome will influence much of politics in the coming years.

Hope inspiring as it was, the year just passed also saw the beginning of the trial of war criminals. This was an electoral pledge of the Awami League and the younger generation was enthused with this expectation to vote for the AL. Now the nation is waiting to see the outcome of the trial.

The year also saw a weak opposition languishing in its archaic politics of fear mongering about the country being taken over by India. The BNP looked frayed and lost in the political wilderness with its chief Khaleda Zia too busy trying to wage a movement that looked more focused on getting her two sons off the corruption hook than on any specific political objectives or thoughts of governance. The BNP walked out of parliament in March and has not returned to it since, making itself look like a ghost of a party that believes in parliamentary democracy.

The year inspired some hope when the results of the Narayanjanj City Corporation elections showed Selina Hayat Ivy, a minnow, winning over Shamim Osman, a powerful person with a shady background but nevertheless backed by the powers that be. The election results once again proved that people's power was mightier than

muscle power and suggested that the parties send the godfathers to a twilight existence.

The year also saw the government trying to work out better ties with India through a number of steps, including offering transit and seeking a deal on a sharing of the Teesta waters, none of which in the end materialized, to the embarrassment of both countries. On both issues rancour runs high among the people.

Extra-judicial killings that were seen in the form of crossfire, appear to have been replaced by disappearances towards the end of the year, which has left a deep sense of unease among the public.

Among the most depressing aspect of the year was the rise of corruption and the government's apparent attitude of doing nothing about it. Highlighted by the impasse with the World Bank over the Padma Bridge, corruption, which has been among the country's biggest challenge for the past several years, attained an endemic form during the year.

The humiliation meted out to and false accusations made against our only Nobel Laureate will stand out as an example of the government's vindictiveness and disregard for the personal reputation of citizens.

As a new year begins today, the issue most likely to dominate the events of the coming year is that of the abolished caretaker government and the formation of the new Election Commission. The economy, especially rising prices, will be another issue that will occupy the public mind heavily. Above all, the general public will carefully observe where the rising trend of confrontational politics will lead the nation.

Water tank

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Suraiya Islam Ira, the deceased, was a grade-II student of Europa International School in the area.

The injured are her mother Milon Akhter, 32, and elder sisters Suraiya Islam Ila, 10, Suraiya Islam Ima, 14. Critically injured Milon was admitted to a local hospital while others were given first aid.

Ira's maternal uncle Mohsin Ahmed said Milon with her three daughters rented a tin-shed house built on the rooftop of the one-storey building seven years back. A water tank on the rooftop of a brick-made bathroom adjacent to their room collapsed around 3:30am on the tin-shed house.

The rubble crushed Ira, who was sleeping with her mother, dead on the spot and her mother was critically injured. Her sisters who were sleeping in the next room also sustained injuries.

Neighbours rescued the victims from under the debris and rushed to hospital. The two-room-tin-shed house was totally damaged in the incident.

Mohsin alleged that house owner Shahidul Islam built the faulty water tank only with bricks and cement. Tenants requested him several times to remove the tank for the sake of safety but he did not pay anything.

He said Milon wanted to shift the house but could not do so as the house owner borrowed Tk 5,00,000 from them and was delaying to pay back.

Mohsin filed a case with Hazaribagh Police Station against the house owner accusing him of building a faulty water tank and ignoring the tenants' safety.

Officer-in-Charge of the station Rafiqul Islam said the owner fled the house following the incident and police are trying to arrest him.

Ira's autopsy was conducted at Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue yesterday. Morgue sources said she suffered injuries to her head and waist.

Troubled Biman

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Asked about what they are going to do to improve the situation, he said they will identify the loss-making routes and stop operation of flights or bring down their frequency on those routes.

He hoped for an improved situation in the next fiscal year as the two new Boeing 777-300ER have started operation.

Biman owes more than Tk 247 crore to its fuel supplier Padma Oil, over Tk 270 crore to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh and Tk 56 crore to the National Board of Revenue in travel taxes, its officials said.

According to Bangladesh Economic Review 2009-10, Biman made profits of Tk 15 crore in fiscal 2008-'9 and around Tk 6 crore in 2007-'8.

Textbook

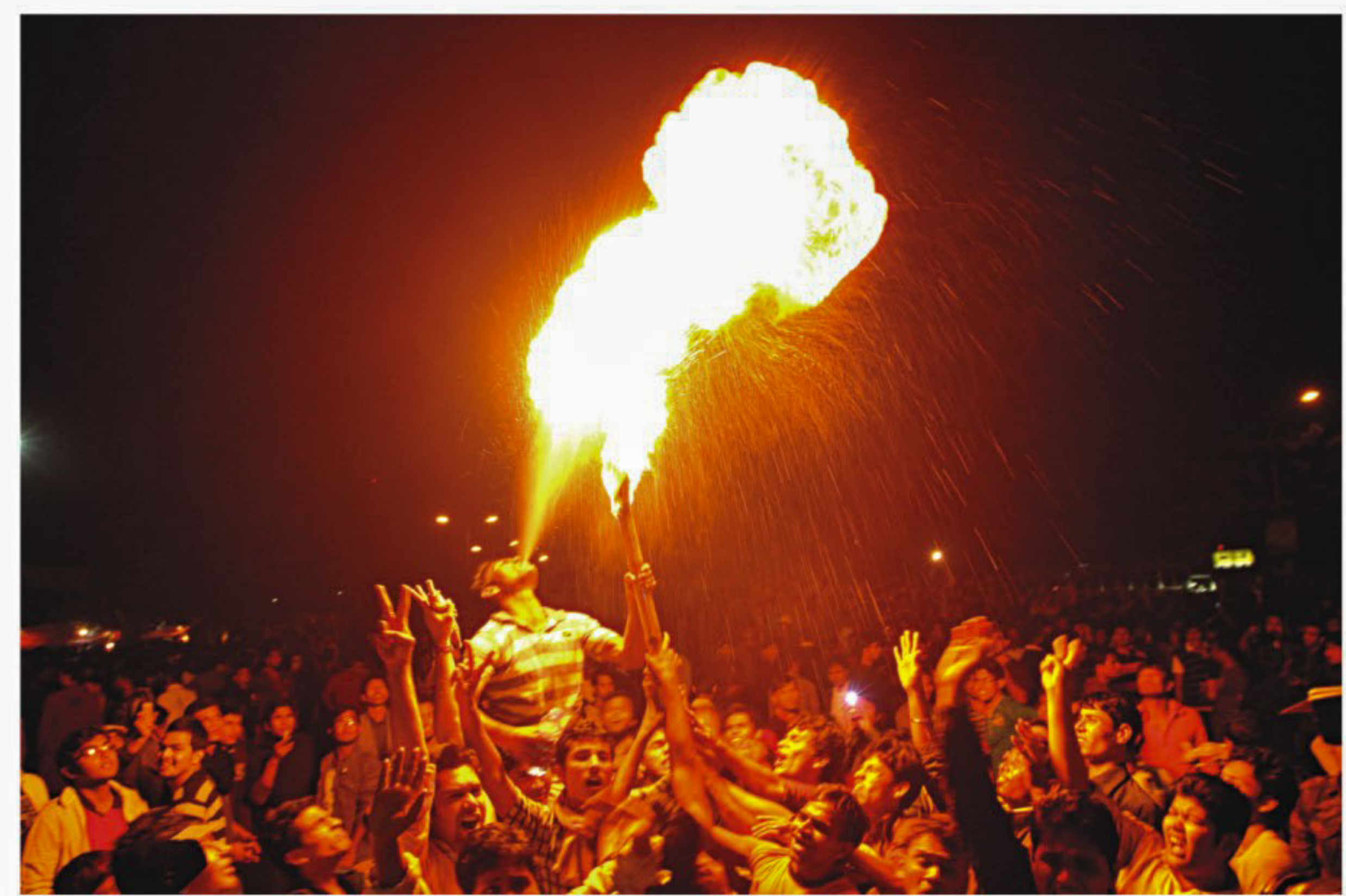
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primary, secondary and technical education schools, and Ebtedayee and Dakhil madrasas.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid will inaugurate the festival through distribution of books at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College at 10:00am. He will also hand over books free of cost to the students of Motijheel Government Boys School at 12:00 noon.

Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry Rashed Khan Menon, Education Secretary Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Chairman of National Curriculum and Textbook Board Prof Mostafa Kamaluddin and Director General of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education Prof Noman-ur-Rashid are expected to be present at the book distribution ceremony.

Meanwhile, primary and mass education Minister Dr Mohammad Afsarul Amin will also hand over colourful books among junior school students of city's Motijheel Ideal Government Primary School tomorrow at 11:00am.

Textbooks have already reached the schools in all upazilas.



Youths rejoice on the Dhaka University campus at the zero hour to welcome the New Year 2012. Security was stepped up in the capital to ensure the celebrations go peacefully.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Mass awareness key

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developing countries, she said.

Diagnosing cancer and carrying out therapy and surgery require a multidisciplinary effort of oncologists, medical physicists and technicians, said Prof Hasin Anupama Azhari, chairman of the Department of Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering at Gono Biswabidyalay.

Prof Syed Muhammad Akram Hussain, consultant oncologist at Labaid Hospital, said 66 percent of cancer patients were aged between 30 and 65, posing a huge social and economic liability.

But he feels that the government does not attach due priority to the issue because of which the exact number of cancer related deaths remains unknown.

The country has only 21 Linear Accelerators and Tele Cobalt machines for cancer therapy against a demand of 300, said Akram.

Prof Dr M Anwar Hossain of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Dhaka University said various forms of pollution caused cancer in 95 percent of the cases while the rest were caused genetically.

Cancer accounts for 13 percent of all deaths in the world, he added.

Prof Pran Gopal Datta, vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said a complete team was vital for cancer treatment at any given institution.

Tobacco consumption causes 5.4 million deaths around the world each year. Stopping the habit would

reduce the number of cancer patients by 30 percent, he said.

Preventing air pollution and ensuring safe drinking water can also drastically cut the number of cancer patients, he said.

According to a 2005 estimate of the World Health Organisation, the Bangladesh government earns Tk 25 billion as revenue from the tobacco trade but Tk 51 billion is spent in treating tobacco-related cancers.

Gopal attributed the reason behind such a huge number of cancer patients seeking treatment abroad to misbehaviour from physicians, confusion about the diagnosis and mindset of wealthy people.

Dr ABMF Karim, professor emeritus of radiation oncology at Vrije University Hospital in Amsterdam, said a large number of cancer patients sought treatment abroad due to a lack of trust in local physicians and in the service system.

But the perception that foreign doctors are better is wrong, he said.

Trust must be restored in the service delivery system, said Prof K Siddique-e-Rabbani, chairman of the Department of Biomedical Physics and Technology at Dhaka University.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said cancer treatment required a comprehensive vision and roadmap.

Local medical personnel should address the reason behind patients seeking treatment abroad and make the achievements in cancer treatment easily accessible

to the masses, he said.

Prof Golam Abu Zakaria, medical physicist of Cologne University, Germany, said Bangladesh needed around 230 radio therapy centres but had only 18.

It would need 1,000 oncologists, 600 medical physicists and 500 technicians to face the emerging challenges of cancer treatment, he added.

The discussion suggested a number of recommendations, including bringing down the costs of diagnosis and therapy, creating awareness on food habits and lifestyle, diagnosis with molecular technology, adequate pathological facilities, easy procurement of diagnostic and therapy equipment, post-procurement service, public private partnership and designated cancer treatment centres.

They also suggested inclusion of cervical cancer prevention programme in the Extended Immunisation Programme, training of 30 radio oncologists, medical physicists and technicians from Dhaka Medical College Hospital, National Cancer Institute and Bogra Hospital and implementation of the National Cancer Control Strategy and Action Plan.

Dr Sarwar Alam, associate professor of oncology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, and Dr AFM Kamal Uddin, radiation oncologist of Dhaka Dental College, also spoke at the discussion, which was moderated by Prof Karim.

Latif resents not calling him freedom fighter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Textiles and Jute Minister Abdul Latif Siddique yesterday came down heavily on a moderator of a workshop for not mentioning him as a freedom fighter.

The minister expressed his resentment at the moderator at a workshop hosted by Katalyst in association with Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) at Brac Centre Inn in the city.

"The moderator has mentioned the names of everyone present here. He has introduced Finance Minister AMA Muhith as a freedom fighter. But I am also a minister and a freedom fighter. He didn't bother to honour me. Then where am I?" questioned Latif, the special guest of the event.

"It is not only disgraceful for me, but also humiliating for the prime minister. You people do business in the name of workshops, and humiliate us by inviting to your programme. But I am not going to tolerate this. Had I known it earlier that this is a CPD-Katalyst programme, I wouldn't have come here," he maintained.

Journalist Jahiduzzaman Faruk moderated the workshop on jute and the country's economy.

JU student dies in rooftop fall

JU CORRESPONDENT

A masters student of Jahangirnagar University (JU) yesterday died after falling from the rooftop of a four-storey student dormitory on the campus.

The deceased was identified as Muradur Rahman, 26, son of school teacher Osman Goni, of Akur Tukur Para of Sadar upazila in Tangail.

He was a student of the English department and lived in Shaheed Salam Barkat Hall of the university.

Students of the dormitory alleged that he fell at about 5:00pm from the roof of the hall while talking over mobile phone. There was no railing around the roof.

He was instantly taken to the university's medical centre in a critical condition and doctors referred to Savar Enam Medical College Hospital where the on-duty doctors pronounced him dead.

JU Proctor Prof Dr Arzu Miah claimed the incident was an accident. A probe body is yet to be formed.

Following the incident, the JU authorities cancelled all programmes on the occasion of New Year's Eve.

Dhaka int'l trade fair

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open from 10:00am to 10:00pm every day. The entry fee for an adult has been fixed at Tk20 and for a child Tk10.

Commerce Minister GM Quader yesterday briefed journalists on the fair at the temporary office of the Export Promotion Bureau on the fair site.

He said the organisers expected that one lakh people would visit the fair every day as besides an exhibition of products, the fair would also be considered a good place for an outing in the favourable weather condition in this period of the year.

The government gives special incentives to foreign companies every year to encourage them to come to the fair, Quader said.

Commerce Secretary Ghulam Hussain said the

commerce ministry, Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha and the public works ministry had been working together to develop a permanent fair complex at Purbachal Satellite Town.

A permanent venue for the trade fair was earlier set to be constructed at the old airport in the city's Tejgaon. But the decision was cancelled when a Chinese construction firm refused to make an underground parking system at the main fair venue.

Finally, the government decided to construct the permanent venue at Purbachal, Hussain said.

Many foreign companies do not want to participate in a month-long fair and that is one of the major reasons behind thin participation of foreign companies in the fair, he added.

He said the commerce

ministry did not allow any trading company this year in the fair. "Rather, we have allocated stalls for manufacturing and production companies so they can showcase locally made products to customers for gaining greater market access."

The ministry is expecting more spot orders than last year that had spot orders worth Tk25 crore. The spot orders in 2010 amounted to Tk22.86 crore.

Among the major products, machinery, carpets, cosmetics and beauty products, electrical and electronics, jute goods, leather goods, sports goods, sanitary products, toys, ceramics, locally made fabrics, cables, processed foods, furniture and handicrafts will be showcased on the 1.25 million square feet venue of the 17th trade fair.

Inter-dist bus fare hiked

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fares within a year. The government increased bus fares by around 30 percent on May 16 and Tk 0.5 a km on September 19.

However, fares of Dhaka and Chittagong city service buses will remain unchanged until further notice.

The decision to increase the intercity bus fare was made at a meeting held between Communications Minister Obaidul Quader, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials, bus owners and others stakeholders at the Sarak Bhaban in the capital.

According to the revised bus fare, each passenger will have to pay Tk 1.35 instead of Tk 1.20 per km on inter-district routes, BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman told reporters after the meeting.

The communications ministry is to issue a gazette notification regarding the new bus fare today.

"The decision of increasing 15 paise per kilometre has been made considering 16 criteria," he said. Although the cost evaluation committee, led by the BRTA

chairman himself, proposed a Tk 0.23 per km increase, the communications minister wanted only Tk 0.15 per km hike, he said.

A meeting source said the bus owners actually wanted an even bigger increase of bus fare but the communications minister held firm.

Meeting sources said the minister told others that they should accept the Tk 0.15 increase considering the country's current economic state and sufferings of passengers.

"We are not satisfied with this fare hike. We want Tk 0.50 per kilometre increase. But we have to honour the decision and the minister requested us to consider the passengers' sufferings," said managing director of a bus service company.

On bus fares in Dhaka and Chittagong city, the BRTA chairman said more than 70 percent buses of Dhaka and Chittagong run on CNG. The fare remains unchanged since the CNG price is the same as before.

A leader of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity had demanded increasing the city bus fares in the meeting

but the BRTA officials were against it.

The BRTA chairman said legal action would be taken if any bus operator charges extra in Dhaka and Chittagong cities.

When the BRTA chairman was told that CNG-run intercity buses would now enjoy increased fare from passengers, Ayubur said only 2-3 percent intercity buses run on CNG. And that is why those buses were not considered whilst drafting the new fare chart.

Even though the government decided to increase bus fares yesterday evening, there have been allegations that bus operators on some routes had started charging extra since Friday morning.

"I used to travel to Dhaka from Munshiganj for Tk 45. But today (Saturday), they charged me Tk 50 making the excuse of fuel price hike," said Foyzal Intiaz, a student.

Meanwhile, Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, also the executive president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, was not present in yesterday's meeting.