

Outcry at JS

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even at midnight as people in Dhaka and its outskirts use many air-conditioners. We are preparing a master plan to resolve the problem."

Nani Gopal Mondal, Awami League MP from Dakop-Batiaghata (Khulna-1) constituency, launched a verbal attack on the state minister during the question hour saying that people in his area did not get electricity even at midnight.

"Why will there be load shedding at midnight when the irrigation season was over several weeks ago?" he questioned, adding, "It's really hard to reply to people when they express their anger to me due to regular power outages."

AL lawmaker AK Mozammel Huq from Gazipur said his area got only 62 megawatt power against a demand of 163 MW.

Another AL MP, Shofiqul Islam from Jhenaidah-Harinakunda, said he was facing a very bad situation as the local people complained about frequent power outages.

Jatiya Party legislator Hafizuddin Ahmed said the grand alliance had only one year left to address the electricity crisis as the general elections were very near.

"In our electoral pledges, we had promised to resolve the power crisis. But the problem remains the same. If we fail to address the issue, it might lead the grand alliance to face a very bad result," he warned.

Senior AL MP Shamsur Rahman Sherif from Pabna and Emaj Uddin Pramanik from Naogaon also expressed their concern over power outages in their constituencies.

Budget

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their allocated time for speaking on the topic. They spent 40 percent of their allocated time by speaking on other issues and 12 percent to speak about issues in their respective constituencies.

During discussions on the proposed budget for 2010-11 FY, MPs spent only 38 percent of their allocated time to speak on budgetary documents. They spent 47 percent of their allocated time to speak on other issues and 15 percent time on issues in their respective constituencies, the study adds.

The MPs spent less time during discussion on the proposed budget for 2011-2012 FY. They spent only 37 percent of their allocated time to speak on the budgetary proposals and 46 percent to speak on other issues. The remaining 17 percent was spent on issues in their respective constituencies, the study continues.

Over 40 hours of discussions took place over each of the last three budgets in the absence of the BNP-led opposition MPs, who boycotted all three budget sessions.

Akbar Ali Khan, a former adviser to a caretaker government, said the main obstacle to a people oriented budget was the lack of participation of MPs in the passage of the budget.

"The parliamentary standing committees should also be involved in the process to make the budget people oriented," he added.

Akbar Ali Khan was speaking at a discussion on the findings of the study held at the ministers' hostel at the parliament building.

He suggested that the rules of procedure of parliament be amended to pave the way for sending a proposed budget to the standing committees for detailed discussion.

A number of MPs, who were present at the discussion, agreed with him and said the duration of the budget session should be increased to two months.

Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said any MP may place a proposal for amending the rules of procedure of parliament.

Fazle Rabbi Mia, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on law ministry, said even if 350 MPs spoke at the budget discussion and brought in numerous amendments, it would not work unless the prime minister wished to bring any changes into the proposed budget.

People's desires were reflected only in the budget placed by then finance minister Tajuddin Ahmad, he added.

Farming, ecology

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Bangladeshi experts, however, differ and say the 390m long and 162.8m high dam across the Barak River in the Indian state of Manipur will automatically release extra water after a certain level.

The flood control project will have an installation capacity of 1500 MW, documents show.

Gowher Rizvi and Mashhur Rahman -- advisers to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina -- went to India in December last year to inquire about the project. They, however, returned home with an offer from the Indian prime minister that India would like Bangladesh to become an equity partner in the project.

Contacted, eminent environmentalist Atiq Rahman said, "If India really wanted us to be an equity partner, they [India] should have involved us while designing the dam so that we could raise our concerns."

Even if Bangladesh accepts Indian's proposal of becoming a partner in the project and get a share of the electricity, it will not compensate for the agricultural and ecological damage the dam will spell on the country.

"The haor region grows about 180 lakh tonnes of Boro rice a year, nearly 10 percent of the country's total Boro production," M Inamul Haq, former director general of Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board, told The Daily Star.

A rise in the water level in winter will significantly reduce the extent of arable land there, he said.

The dam will block the drainage system of croplands in haor areas from December to February and lack of irrigation might hamper the Boro yield by at least Tk 1,000 crore per year, he added.

Boro rice is the single crop of the haor region. "Increasing water flow in the rivers would not help the agriculture in the region. It would help if it were in the northern districts of the country," said Inamul Haq.

MPs blast

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Sayeed offer an unconditional apology in the House.

Prof Md Ali Ashraf, who was presiding over the sitting, said Sayeed's remark was tantamount to contempt of parliament and democracy.

"Parliament should summon him [Sayeed]... Keep him standing in the House and ask him to offer unconditional apology before the nation," said Ashraf, a lawmaker from the ruling Awami League.

"[It [Sayeed's comment] is a bad sign, and if we don't take action against him it will be harmful for democracy."

He suggested that lawmakers submit a notice for bringing a censure motion against Sayeed in the House.

Referring to newspaper reports, Ashraf said Prof Sayeed had told a TIB programme on Saturday that lawmakers and ministers acted like thieves and dacoits, and their behaviour was not proper. And they ignored their oath.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, leader of the House, was present at the sitting.

Taking the floor on a point of order, independent lawmaker Fazul Azim raised the issue and said Prof Sayeed had undermined the lawmakers' dignity and the sovereignty of parliament by making such comments.

"Parliament should do something against such derogatory comments."

After him, Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujib-ul-Haque Chunnun came down hard on Prof Sayeed and other intellectuals for criticising lawmakers and ministers on different occasions.

"They [intellectuals] can only give advice but it was the politicians who won independence for the country," he said.

AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim also criticised Prof Sayeed and other intellectuals. He, however, did not mention any names other than Prof Sayeed.

"Intellectuals like him [Prof Sayeed] give certificates to lawmakers, ministers and the government. But who will give them certificates?"

They bring a lot of money but on whom do they spend that? "They [Transparency International Bangladesh] bring money from non-governmental organisations and talk against democracy and parliament," said Selim.

He said intellectuals like Prof Sayeed had always supported uneducated, illegal and military regimes because they get something from those governments.

Selim also asked what authority TIB had to inquire about corruption in ministries.

"We all know their role in 1/11. They did not say anything when the last caretaker government arrested students."

The AL lawmaker called upon the finance minister to find out the sources of TIB's funds and how they organised "one or two colourful programmes" every week.

"You [the finance minister] should look into how they [TIB officials] own cars and live a posh life. They must answer," said Selim.

153 feared

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to Lagos with about 153 people on board," Nigeria's head of civil aviation Harold Demuren told AFP.

Lagos State police spokesman Joseph Jayeoba told AFP the plane went down in the Iju neighbourhood on the mainland of the city where the bulk of the city's population lives.

Hundreds of residents swarmed the area to see what had happened.

Israeli airstrikes wound 7 in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Seven Palestinians were wounded in a series of Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early morning yesterday, two days after fire exchanges that left three dead from both sides.

According to emergency medical sources in Gaza, the seven were wounded in four airstrikes, two carried out at targets east of Khan Yunis, in the southern part of the Palestinian territory, and two that hit Beit Layiha in the northern section of the Strip.

Wealthy beyond

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Suranjit's APS Omar Faruq Talukder was sacked, and Railway General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha and its Dhaka Division Security Commandant Enamul Huq were suspended after Tk 70 lakh was found in Faruq's microbus at the Pikhana BGB headquarters on April 9 night.

Faruq, Mridha and his wife Zakiya Yusuf, and Enamul and his wife Rahat Ara Diba yesterday submitted separate statements on their movable and immovable assets to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

MRIDHA, HIS WIFE'S ASSETS

In his statement, Mridha said he had Fixed Deposit Receipts (FDR) of Tk 10 lakh and three five-katha plots of land in Rajuk's Purbachal Project and Pirer Bagh in the capital, and another three-katha plot in a project of Chittagong Development Authority.

He also owns three acres of farmland at his village home in Madaripur.

Mridha's wife is richer than him. Zakiya Yusuf, who is a housewife, has an FDR worth Tk 20 lakh and gold ornaments worth about Tk 1.25 lakh. She owns a five-katha plot in the capital's Bashundhara and 1.5 acres of land worth several crores of taka in Madaripur and Manikganj.

The couple have Tk 2.50 lakh in cash and owe only Tk 5,000 to the Housing Building Finance Corporation.

Their assets do not match with the earnings of a railway general manager, who draws a monthly salary between Tk 45,000 and Tk 52,000.

According to Rajuk rules, one cannot possess a Rajuk plot or flat if one or one's spouse already has any flats or plots of land in the Dhaka City Corporation area.

ENAMULAND HIS WIFE'S ASSETS

The couple also possess huge wealth. According to Enamul's statement, he has

Tk 1.13 crore in several banks. He owns a 5.5-katha plot in Narayanganj and an acre of land in Kishoreganj.

An officer of his rank usually draws a monthly salary of Tk 35,000.

Enamul's wife has a 1,564 square-foot flat at Niketan and another 1,510 square-foot flat at Vataran in the capital's Gulshan area. Besides, she owns a plastic industry in the capital's Uttar Badda.

In her statement, Diba said she had invested Tk 45 lakh in the industry. Of the amount, Tk 20 lakh belonged to her and she had taken the rest as loan from a bank.

FARUQ'S ASSETS

Faruq is not lagging behind them in terms of assets.

He has a Deposit Pension Scheme of Tk 1 lakh and a fixed deposit of Tk 91.97 lakh, including Tk 70 lakh found in his microbus on April 9, with Mercantile Bank. Faruq had earlier claimed that of the Tk 70 lakh, he had earned Tk 45 lakh from his legal practice and received the rest from his expatriate brother-in-law.

Moreover, Faruq owns a 1,100 square-foot flat in the capital's Mohammadpur area and a Toyota car. He also has 18 acres of land worth about Tk 5 crore in Sunamganj and Netrakona.

Both Mridha and Faruq were reluctant to speak to the media after submitting their statements to the ACC.

"I mentioned everything about my assets in the statement to the ACC. The media are not supposed to know about it," Faruq told reporters.

Acting ACC chairman Mohammad Badiuzzaman later told reporters that they would examine the statements.

"We will take action if we find any discrepancies in their statements. If necessary, we will ask them to appear before the commission and interrogate them," he said.

On the night of April 9,

Faruq's microbus driver Ali Azam drove the vehicle carrying Faruq, Mridha and Enamul to the BGB headquarters in the capital. The driver hollered at the guards that there was illegal money in the microbus.

BGB personnel searched the vehicle and found Tk 70 lakh, reportedly collected from job seekers in the railway's east zone, stashed in the vehicle. They detained the four but released them the next day. Driver Azam has been missing since then.

Suranjit stepped down as railway minister on April 16, taking full responsibility for the incident.

The ACC formed a three-member committee headed by its director Tahidul Islam on April 17 to probe the involvement of Faruq, Mridha and Enamul with the cash in railway recruitment.

Rare transit

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People from across the country will be able to witness the transit, when the black dot of Venus can be observed at the innermost point of solar disc, around 7:30 am, said a release of science club, Anushandhitsu Chokro.

The small disc of Venus will touch the Sun's disc internally at 10:33 am. It will completely come out of the solar disc by 10:50 am, it said.

FR Sarkar, general secretary of Bangladesh Astronomical Society, yesterday cautioned people not to view the transition with a naked eye to avert severe health hazard.

Such transit of Venus across the Sun earlier took place in 2004.

On this occasion, Anushandhitsu Chokro will organise a programme titled "National Venus Transit 2012 Observation Camp" at the playground of the capital's Motijheel Govt Boy's School to enable the interested people to witness the rare event from 7:00 am on

Energy

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over the past several years. Private investment rate came down to 19.1 percent of GDP this fiscal year from 19.5 percent in 2010-11.

Apart from the energy crisis, volatilities in the global economic environment, high inflation and tighter credit conditions played a role to this investment deterioration.

Ellen Goldstein, WB country director of Bangladesh and Nepal, said Bangladesh's ability to provide adequate infrastructure, energy and a business-friendly regulatory environment had also suffered in recent years.

"If these are addressed, we feel Bangladesh will be able to overcome the impact of a weak global economy without much difficulty."

Sanjay Kathuria, lead country economist of WB, said Bangladesh was a very resilient economy, but there was a lot of room for growth.

On the stagnant local private sector and foreign investments, he said the government should act fast to set up special economic zones to accommodate some anchor investors.

"Land crisis is getting to be a bigger problem for investors."

Despite all these setbacks, Bangladesh is likely to achieve 6.3 percent GDP growth in FY 2011-12, down from 6.7 percent a year ago. The WB attributed this slowdown to unfavourable external economics and internal supply constraints (energy and infrastructure).

Still, 6.3 percent growth is higher than the developing country average (5.5 percent) and slightly lower than the South Asia average (6.5 percent).

"Bangladesh has maintained this average growth over the last three years through strong manufacturing and remittance growth. Transport and financial intermediations have led growth in services," said the WB report.

Zahid Hussain, senior economist of WB Dhaka office, said Bangladesh economy was facing four challenges -- three from external and one from internal aspects. And these are Euro crisis, turmoil in Gulf countries, oil price volatility and internal energy crisis.

Replying to a query on amnesty for black money, he said both reality and ideology should be considered before allowing it in the upcoming budget. "Impacts on revenue should also be considered."

"We don't know what scheme is coming exactly to whiten black money. But there shouldn't be any scheme that will ultimately encourage black money

Nimtoli fire

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told The Daily Star yesterday. "It is as if we have gone 20 years back in our life after losing our beloved family members. There are some memories that you can never forget."

"Still we have been trying to start afresh."

Didar and Gulzar were blessed with sons some five months ago. Didar named his newborn baby Emran Didar while Gulzar named his son Sabab Gulzar.

"We have named them after the ones we lost because we want to find them in the babies," said Didar, choking back tears.

From painting the walls in their flats to arranging furniture, their efforts seem to give back the house its previous look, as it was before the fire.

"It is difficult to undo the damage but we have been trying to do this for the last two years," said Didar, pointing out the little differences in the tiles of the floor before and after the incident.

It appears that all they want is to feel that the fire never happened in their life.

Talking about their marriages, Didar said, "We just maintained the formality. We did not arrange any programme."

"We [family members] have also decided not to celebrate any programme on Thursday [the Nimtoli tragedy occurred on a Thursday]."

He expressed his gratitude to his relatives and neighbours, saying they had been the ones who had come forward with consolation and encouraged them to begin a new life.

"It is not possible to describe the pain of such loss in words. I pray to God so that such incidents do not occur in anyone's life," said a grieving

Women can do everything

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out of their cocoons and engage themselves in all kinds of activities similar to those of their male counterparts.

"We have dedicated our victory to the young generation of Bangladesh. We hope they will be attracted to adventures instead of drugs," she added.

This was a joint adventure of a young man and a young woman. If the young generation irrespective of gender merge, they can be a strong force and can overcome all obstacles, Nishat observed.

"I cannot express my feelings of that moment when I hoisted the national flag atop Mount Everest. I just thought of my country and people from my soul," she said, adding, "The weather on the peak was very rough. It seemed that the wind would sweep me away."

Talking about their trekking experience, Nishat said, "I think I have been born for the second time because we escaped death miraculously during our trekking. We went through all kinds of hazardous moments that one may face during trekking. We were between life and death."

"I sustained injuries on my head and nose due to the avalanche during the trekking," Nishat added.

Asked about her future plans, she said, "I am committed to serving the nation and upholding the image of the country through my activities."

Expressing the feeling of climbing the peak for the second time, Mohit said, "Scaling Mount Everest through the Nepal side is at least 20 times tougher than climbing through the Tibetan side."

Both Nishat and Mohit expressed their hope of continuing with mountaineering in future.

Nishat's father Abdul Mannan Majumder, who was also present at the airport, said this achievement had become an example for every woman in Bangladesh and would help them to break out of social superstitions and engage themselves in tough tasks.

Relatives, colleagues, members of Bangla Mountaineering and Trekking Club (BMTIC), and representatives of different government bodies, including the ministry of women and children affairs and Bangladesh Tourism Board, greeted the duo at the airport with flowers, banners and festoons.

Leaving the airport, a motorcade arranged by the

sponsors and BMTIC passed through different streets in the city. Later the duo went to the Central Shaheed Minar to pay homage to the language martyrs.

On May 19, Nishat reached the summit of Mount Everest, while Mohit became the first Bangladeshi to have scaled the peak from both sides.

Nishat, accompanied by Mohit, started her expedition on April 9 from Kathmandu under the campaign "Because I am a Girl" by Plan Bangladesh.

Musa Ibrahim, the first Bangladeshi to achieve the feat, conquered the Everest on May 23, 2010.

Meanwhile, another Bangladeshi woman mountaineer Wasfia Nazreen, who also conquered Mount Everest after Nishat, reached Kathmandu at around 9:00 am yesterday.

She will return to Dhaka around four or five days later on completion of all the procedures, including receiving a certificate at Kathmandu.

Wasfia, who scaled the Everest on May 26 as the second Bangladeshi woman to do so, started her expedition on March 26 under a campaign titled "Bangladesh on Seven Summits" supported by the Liberation War

Largest limestone

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size of the deposit. "It will take one more month to ascertain the total reserve..."

The Geological Survey, which has made most of the coal, limestone, hard rock and peat discoveries in the country since the 1950s, yesterday struck limestone 456.6 metres below the ground. It drilled 5.5 metres further into the layer, which indicated that the layer was thick.

She said as the geologists were drilling deep, they were hoping that the layer would expand more. "The basin seems bigger," she said.

In the 1960s, the then Geological Survey of Pakistan discovered a large limestone deposit in Jamalganj of Joypurhat. The deposit was between 518.16 metres and 548.64 metres under the ground.

Later, studies revealed that 270 million tonnes of lime-

stone were there and 100 million tonnes of it could be mined.

However, the mine was later deemed financially unviable as the cost to control the underground temperature would have been too expensive and the layer was pretty far below the surface.

Yesterday's discovery was much closer to the surface.

LIMESTONE IN BANGLADESH
In 1961, the Geological Survey of Pakistan found limestone deposits in Bagalibazar-Takerghat-Bhangerghat area of Sunamganj. The total deposit of around 30 million tonnes was found in four locations at depths between six metres and 100 metres.

At Takerghat, at least 612,371 tonnes of limestone were mined between 1972 and 1993, according to the Geological Survey of Bangladesh.

In the 60's, limestone deposits were found in Bogra (nearly 2,000 metres below the surface), in Patnitala of Naogaon (300 metres below the surface), Paharpur of Joypurhat (500 metres below the surface) and in Jamalganj of Joypurhat.

In 1966, Fried Krupp Roshtoff of Germany undertook a feasibility study of limestone mining in Jamalganj and found the mine was economically feasible. In 1969 the government undertook a mining project that was never launched.

In 1978, the Geological Survey of Bangladesh came up with a fresh analysis saying that the Jamalganj deposit had 100 million tonnes of mineable limestone covering a 6.7 square km area.

However, the project was abandoned due to the high cost involved in controlling

Absentee witnesses

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Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Sayeede is facing 20 counts of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

The prosecution was supposed to have 68 witnesses testify against Sayeede. However, on March 20, it said it would not be possible to produce 46 prosecution witnesses against Sayeede as the remaining witnesses were either very sick or missing. The prosecution asked the court to accept the witness' statements to the investigation officer of the case as depositions before the court.

The court said it found no grounds on which prosecution witness Ruhul Amin Nobin could be called back to the tribunal.

It asked the defence to deposit to the court Tk 5,000 by June 15 as expenses for the witness' transport, lodging and meals.

The defence had earlier agreed to pay for these expenses.

rised about the defence claim as everything would be clear after the prosecution submitted its documents against the claim.

TWO WITNESSES CALLED BACK
The tribunals yesterday allowed re-cross-examination of two prosecution witnesses.

The defence on May 29 appealed to the tribunal to call back witnesses Mahbulul Alam Hawlader, Ruhul Amin Nobin and Manik Posari so that it could ask them more questions on evidence submitted by the last prosecution witness.

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China

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build a second bridge over the mighty river Padma under Public-Private Partnership.

Construction of the 6.10-km second Padma bridge with a railway track between Paturia-Goalanda was estimated at \$1.9 billion.

During the meeting, the delegation also voiced its willingness to provide 200 meter-gauge passenger bogies to Bangladesh Railway. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) to this end will be signed soon.

The Chinese delegation also agreed to conduct a feasibility study on constructing Dhaka-Chittagong Elevated Expressway train line.

Senior officials of the communications ministry and Bangladesh Railway were present.