

## RAMPAL POWER PROJECT

# Protesters vow to 'resist' govt move

AKRAM HOSEN

People would resist the government move to set up the coal-fired Rampal power plant near the Sundarbans, protesters said in a rally in Faridpur yesterday.

The government decision to lay the foundation stone of the controversial project on October 22 reflects its worries over public protests, said the protesters, who are on a long march to Rampal, demanding cancellation of the project.

Earlier, speaking at a press briefing, Prime Minister's Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the foundation stone of the power plant would be laid on October 22 after addressing all environmental concerns.

"His comment proves that the government fears its plan to give away a vast area of the Sundarbans to corporations would not succeed," said Anu Muhammad, member secretary of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports.

Speakers at the rally said people would resist not only the controversial project but any move that might jeopardise the world's largest mangrove forest.

Local leaders and activists of left-leaning political parties and environmental groups joined the long march "Save the Sundarbans" when it reached Faridpur from Rajbari in the evening.

Earlier, the protesters held a cultural event and a rally in Rajbari town.

The protesters reached Manikganj around 6:00pm on Tuesday and paraded different roads in the town yesterday morning, carrying banners and placards against the project.

On their way to Rampal, the demonstrators will hold rallies in Jessore and Khulna.

The long march, which is expected to reach Rampal on Saturday, will end with a rally at Digraj.

More than 1,200 people set out on the long march, organised by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, from the capital's Jatiya Press Club around 11:00am on Tuesday.

Bangladesh and India had inked a deal on April 20 to set up a 1,320MW coal-fired power plant at Rampal, only 14 kilometres away from the Sundarbans.

The project had drawn huge flak from environmentalists and eminent citizens, who say it would jeopardise the Sundarbans.



The long march "Save the Sundarbans" reaches Rajbari from Manikganj yesterday on its way to Rampal in Bagerhat. The march, organised by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, began from the capital on Tuesday, demanding cancellation of the Rampal power project, only 14 km away from the world's largest mangrove forest.

PHOTO: STAR

## Death penalty

FROM PAGE 16

The prosecution produced 25 witnesses, including two investigation officers, to prove the charges, but the defence could not produce a witness for what they said they didn't get cooperation from relatives of their "abscinding" clients.

On Monday and Tuesday, prosecutor Sahidur Rahman placed arguments on the factual aspects, while prosecutor Haider Ali yesterday placed arguments on the legal aspects.

Referring to the verdicts of Jamaat leaders Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman, Haider said Al-Badr was an auxiliary force of the Pakistani army during the war.

Mueen, as the operation-in-charge of Al-Badr, and Ashraf, as its chief executor, were in a superior position of the killing squad and as per section 4 (2) of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, they have to shoulder all responsibilities of the infamous force,

he said.

The section says, "Any commander or superior officer, who orders, permits, acquiesces or participates in the commission of any of the crimes specified in section 3 or is connected with any plans and activities involving the commission of such crimes or who fails or omits to discharge his duty to maintain discipline, or to control or supervise the actions of the persons under his command or his subordinates, whereby such persons or subordinates or any of them commit any such crimes, or who fails to take necessary measures to prevent the commission of such crimes, is guilty of such crimes."

Haider argued that Al-Badr men picked up leading Bangalee intellectuals and professionals and killed them en masse to cripple the new nation following a common plan and design and evidence showed that Mueen and Ashraf were "directly involved" in that plan and its execution.

Citing testimony of Delwar Hossain, the lone survivor of Rayerbazar massacre who said Mueen and Ashraf were present at the killing filed, Haider said their [Mueen and Ashraf] presence there had also proved their involvement in the killing mission.

On hearsay witnesses in the case, Haider, citing from previous verdicts delivered by the tribunal, said such witnesses are admissible in the court.

Besides, most of the hearsay witnesses heard about the incidents from their family members. Newspapers of the time of occurrence had also covered the incidents mentioning names of the accused, which corroborated the witnesses' accounts, said Haider.

On April 25, the prosecution pressed charges against Mueen and Ashraf, who are now in the UK and the USA respectively. The tribunal on May 27 decided to hold the trial in absentia after its attempts to have the accused in court had failed.

FROM PAGE 1

cheap labour, mostly illiterate. The industry looked towards government support, direct and indirect, such as currency devaluation, tax benefits and cash incentives.

For another, as the industry grew exponentially, its dependence on cheap labour remained unchanged. Its management, labour standards and technology either did not improve or improved little.

The industry grew in a roguish manner as its owners became powerful in society, enough to control politics and bend rules. Finally, it became a rogue industry itself defying rules and regulations, an industry that little values human rights and dignity and gives a damn to the environment.

This is exactly why we find our Mercedes-riding garment owners offering to raise wages of workers only by Tk 600 --- to Tk 3,600! When the last wages were set at Tk 3,000, that was a low base. Since then we have

seen runaway inflation and yet the owners could not feel the heat of it. Probably they live above the leaping price flames. It also reflected on how little they sympathise with their workers.

And now we also see the workers reciprocating the owners' mindless decision by going berserk and creating anarchy. How much can we blame the workers for this outrage?

In the past we have seen how mindlessly the workers have been dealt with. One after another, buildings have collapsed and caught fire, leading to innumerable deaths and mutilations.

And after every accident, BGMEA, the garment owners' organization, has acted in a most heartless manner. After each accident, BGMEA tried to protect the owners, bemoaning more about how much the owners had suffered in losses than in how innocent lives and families had perished.

After the Tazreen fire in which 112 workers died, BGMEA did its best to save

the factory owners. Then it promised to de-list 600 non-functional factories, something it never did for two reasons. First, these substandard factories did cheap stitching for the big owners and, second, these factories as members of BGMEA cast votes in the association's last elections.

BGMEA conducted some drives in a few factories but these were only an eyewash as it only advised on improving safety standards.

The injured and the relatives of the dead did not receive adequate compensation. The relatives of those who died and were identified got only three month's salaries and Tk 7 lakh.

BGMEA was supposed to set up a foundation to look after the children of those who had died. Nothing was done. The list can go on.

After the Rana Plaza disaster, BGMEA's role was no better. Several leaders have told this writer personally that every year 4,000 people die in road accidents. So why are we raising so

much hue and cry in the media over the deaths of 1,100 workers? We could only shudder at the insensitivity and grossness of their thinking.

BGMEA could not even give the exact number of people working in the Rana Plaza factories.

The money that BGMEA gave for the victims was far less than what other organizations did together. However, it was only because of the outrage caused globally that the Rana Plaza victims got better compensations.

Such abysmally low standards in environment, working conditions and wages for an exporting sector have bred only bitter workers. Illiterate and rankled, these workers have become a Frankenstein of the industry's own making. Their productivity is low (35 percent in Bangladesh compared to 80 percent in Vietnam and China). They are the worst paid workers in the category across all garment exporting countries.

All together, the garment industry is today caught in a deadly concoction that the owners cannot realize. All they are capable of doing is seeing conspiracy behind every action, either by the workers or the media. The latest attack on the media by SM Mannan, acting President of BGMEA, for what he said was putting up false and motivated stories of low wages and long working hours is just a reflection of how the garment owners are suffering from myopic vision. Mannan just wants to shift his own blame on to others instead of realizing that a modern industry cannot survive on outdated management styles, especially with a force of 3.6 million illiterate, half-hungry workers.

And the industry must realize that other countries like Vietnam and Myanmar are gearing up their capacity. And Vietnam is likely to get GSP facilities from the US.

All this only rings the bell, loud and clear, for urgent action.

## Adilur denied bail again

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Cyber Crime Tribunal yesterday rejected for a third time a bail petition of Adilur Rahman Khan, secretary of rights body Odhikar, in a case filed for violating Information and Communication Technology Act.

Adilur, now in Kashimpur jail in Gazipur, was arrested on August 10, hours after a case was filed for publishing a false report on the police action on a Hefajat-e Islam rally in the capital.

Odhikar Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan was also made accused in the case.

On September 11, the tribunal issued an

arrest warrant for Elan.

It also directed the officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station to submit a report on the execution of the order by October 21.

The petition was rejected as the charges against Adilur had been proved primarily, said AKM Shamsul Alam, judge of the tribunal.

On September 19, Adilur's lawyer submitted the petition to the tribunal saying the case was filed to harass his client.

Adilur was denied bail twice earlier in the same case. On September 4, the police pressed charges against Adilur and Elan after probing Odhikar's claim that 61 people had died in the police action in the early hours of May 6.

FROM PAGE 1

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The media briefing came just a day after the National Committee to

Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports had begun a long march from the capital towards the project site in Rampal to drum up public opposition to the project.

Environmentalists and eminent citizens have already expressed worries about the project as the plant would produce electricity just 14-km off the Sundarbans. By burning a

huge amount of coal, the plant would also produce green house gases, sulphur, fly ash and other particles hazardous to the World Heritage site.

The government, said the adviser, has chosen the site as a small number of people would have to be evacuated, water would be available and access to the river route would make it easy to import coal.

Tawfiq claimed that the controversy over the plant and its impact on the Sundarbans was "not based on facts."

Initially, the plant would produce about 650 MW of power, said Power Secretary Monowarul Islam.

The Department of Environment has not only approved the scheme, but also made some sugges-

tions, which would be given due consideration, he added.

Bangladesh and India had inked a deal in April to set up the coal-fired power plant in Rampal, Bagerhat.

The adviser also informed newsmen that India would start test supply of 250 MW of power to Bangladesh by Friday, with commercial supply beginning on October 5.

## Govt to lay foundation stone Oct 22

FROM PAGE 1

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## CJ to decide on lower court bail

FROM PAGE 16

Nizamul Huq and Justice Kashefa Hussain on September 1 issued rules asking the government to explain in three weeks why the bail of the Hall-Mark Group chairman should not be cancelled.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan last week placed the petitions before an HC bench led by Justice Enayetur Rahim for hearing and disposing of the rules.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice

Md Akram Hossain Chowdhury forwarded the petitions to Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain, saying that this bench had no jurisdiction to deal with those cases that were filed after 2010.

Khurshid told The Daily Star that the chief justice now could either send the petitions to another HC bench for hearing them or to the bench led by Justice Enayetur Rahim giving it the authority to dispose them of.

Barrister Rafique-Ul Huq appeared for Jasmine.

On August 4, the Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka granted Jasmine bail in all the 11 cases filed by the ACC after she pledged to pay back Tk 2,600 crore that her company swindled out of Sonali Bank, in monthly instalments of Tk 100 crore.

The ACC on October 4 last year filed the cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark Group for their involvement in the scam.

Tanvir Mahmud, managing director of the group who masterminded the fraud, is now in jail.

According to a Bangladesh Bank investigation in May 2012, Hall-Mark and five other companies with the connivance of bank officials had taken out loans of Tk 3,547 crore from the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch of Sonali Bank using forged documents.

Hall-Mark alone took around Tk 2,600 crore.

## Broadcasting policy

FROM PAGE 16

television channel policy next month, Inu said.

The policy will guard against fabrication and distortion of history and vulgarity of commercials and recreational productions, he said, adding that it would also ensure slots for programmes on children and women development.

Once the policy is approved, it will require enactment of a law in parliament to institute a

Broadcasting Commission to issue licences for radio stations and television channels and monitor enforcement of the policy, said the minister.

Editor-in-chief of Boishakhi Television Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, who participated in the programme, said it was necessary to form the commission with non-partisan and competent people immediately.

The commission would

put the licencing process in place and fix a minimum wage structure for the people working in broadcast media, he said.

He also said they were demanding a combined policy covering broadcast, online and the print media, otherwise it would be difficult to enforce separate policies for different media.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh,

said the content and style of most of the television commercials were vulgar and alarming in the context of established social values.

SHUJAN Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar also echoed Iftekharuzzaman in the programme organised by Article 19, a non-government organisation.

Information Commissioner Prof Sadeka Halim and Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamal Dutta, among others, spoke.

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