

Power import begins

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Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh will switch on the supply from respective sides through a teleconference.

After the inauguration, the transmission will be increased up to 250MW, and 500 MW at the end of November.

PGCB Adviser PK Roy, Managing Director Chowdhury Alamgir Hossain and Deputy General Manager of Power Grid Corporation of India Kalim Akhter, among others, were present at the Bheramara substation at the time of importing electricity.

A number of Kushtia people, including businessmen, talking to this correspondent expressed satisfaction over the electricity import and hoped it would help ease the load

shedding they have been facing.

PGCB has set up the substation on 112 acres of land at Gopinathpur in Bheramara with link to substation at Baharampur in West Bengal.

The Bheramara substation is capable of both importing and exporting electricity from and to India.

A 125-kilometre transmission line has been constructed between Bheramara and Baharampur. Of this line, 40km fell inside Bangladesh.

Prime Minister's Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury on Wednesday said India would start a test supply of 250 MW of power by Friday, with commercial supply beginning on October 5.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two coun-

tries in 2010 on import of a total of 500 MW power from India.

Half of this power will be coming from the Indian central government electricity quota and the rest from its open market.

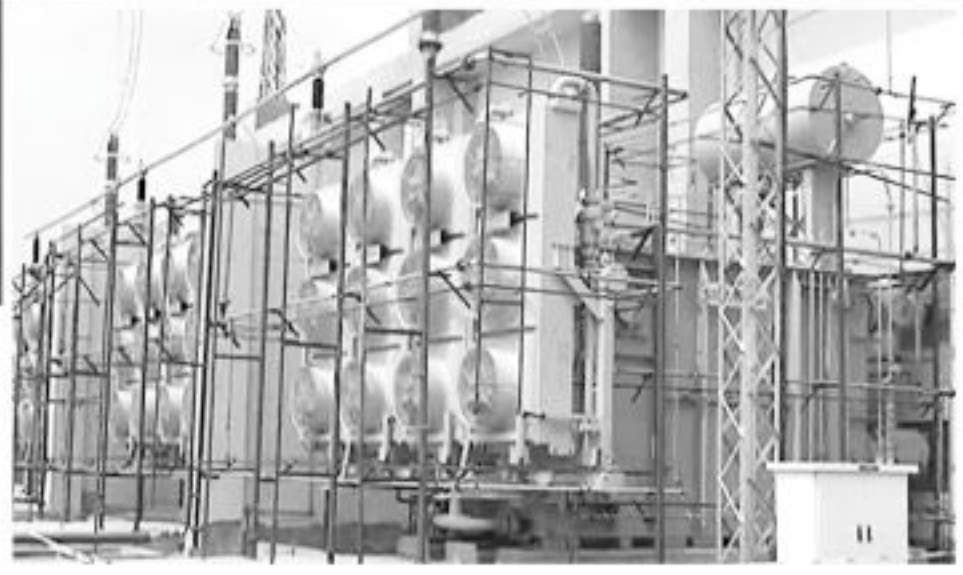
The total amount of electricity, to be imported under a 35-year contract, is expected to improve the country's power crisis situation now being tackled through costly but short-term rental power plants.

The tariff along with the wheeling charge of the power imported will be between a little less than Tk 6 and Tk 6.35 per kilowatt-hour unit.

The rate ranges between Tk 7.5 and Tk 22 per unit for the rental power plants and between Tk 2.5 and Tk 4.8 per unit for the large local gas-fired power plants.



Engineers operate the transmission of power from India at the Bheramara sub-station of Power Grid Company of Bangladesh yesterday. Inset, the Bheramara power grid in Kushtia.



Stand by RMG workers

Yunus urges fashion brands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus has urged fashion leaders and designers to stand up in solidarity with garment workers across the globe to improve their deplorable condition.

He made the appeal while presenting the keynote speech at a UN event for the First Ladies of the US, said a release issued by the Yunus Centre yesterday.

Prof Yunus elaborated his proposal for an international minimum wage to improve the lives of the garment workers.

At the event, Fashion for Development, an NGO devoted to promoting and supporting fashion industry, honoured the founder and editor of The Beast, Tina Brown, for her devotion for women causes.

Prof Yunus handed over the award on behalf of Fashion for Development.

Both Tina Brown and Anna Wintour, editor-in-

chief of the Vogue magazine and the Guru of fashion world, spoke highly of Prof Yunus' contribution to improving the life of poor women around the world.

Prof Yunus, chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), also inaugurated a new campus of the university in NY at the programme.

The event was organised by GCU Vice-chancellor Pamela Gillies, UK minister, and representatives from the fashion industry and over 200 dignitaries.

Prof Yunus also attended an event of the Grameen America, which has now crossed more than \$100 million in disbursements to 19,000 loanees through 12 branches operating in five US states.

He also attended the board meeting of Grameen Prima Care, which is a newly formed organisation providing affordable health insurance to the microcredit borrowers of Grameen America.

Help regain GSP

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The US trade leaders gave emphasis on high level dialogue between business and government leaders to promote trade and investment with Bangladesh, Iqbal Sobhan told reporters.

The US delegation appreciated the leadership of Hasina in promoting US-Bangladesh trade and investment relations.

They also apprised her that they wanted to develop a state level dialogue between business and government leaders.

Pointing out their investment in power sector, energy sector and offshore drilling in Bangladesh, they said the US companies were conducting seismic survey in the energy sector.

They hoped that through the seismic survey, they would discover new oil and gas reserves in Bangladesh.

Appreciating the intension of the US business leaders, Hasina said her government believes in

private sector-driven economy where the government plays the role of a facilitator.

She said her government has opened up some sectors, including power and telecommunications, for competitive private and foreign investment.

"Our government's policy is to put in place a liberalised investment policy in Bangladesh," she told the delegation.

The premier also said the present government had attached importance to regional connectivity, and foreign investors would get benefit of regional business if they invest in Bangladesh.

At the meeting, Hasina requested the Boeing representative to take all measures to complete the supply procedure of two Boeing aircraft by December next for which Bangladesh had already issued a buying order.

The US chamber leaders said Bangladesh is a growing market for US products and

a good importer of raw materials.

So they feel that the relationship between Bangladesh and the USA in the areas of trade, commerce and investment should be promoted further.

They also said the US chamber was considering a business dialogue this year like the previous year, and a delegation would visit Bangladesh soon to formalise the procedure.

They handed over a report on "USA and Bangladesh toward the Future: Policy Recommendation to Strengthen the US-Bangladesh Commercial Relationship" to the premier.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and President of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, among others, were present during the meeting.

Mumbai

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response force initially told AFP that up to 70 people were feared trapped.

The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai said that the building was for employees of the local administration and their families, who had been asked to leave earlier this year.

"The building was around 30 years old. We had issued a notice to them in April, to vacate the building, but they did not act," Khabale-Patil said.

He did not explain why the families had been asked to leave.

Five other blocks have collapsed in or close to Mumbai in recent months, including one in April that killed 74 people.

Two builders and seven others were arrested in connection with the April collapse of the unauthorised and partly finished building.

Three buildings caved in around Mumbai in the

month of June alone, killing 25 people between them.

The incidents have highlighted poor quality construction and violations of the building code, caused by massive demand for housing and endemic corruption.

The high cost of property in Mumbai and surrounding areas pushes many low-paid families, especially newly arrived migrants from other parts of India, into often illegal and shoddily-built homes.

More than half of the city's residents live in slums, while across India the urban housing shortage was estimated at nearly 19 million households in 2012.

Falling buildings are a nationwide problem. The Guardian newspaper website gathered crime statistics showing that 2,651 people were killed across India in 2012 from the collapse of 2,737 structures, including houses and bridges.

Rahul blasts govt move

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Everybody is doing this. Congress does this, BJP does this, Samajwadi Party and Janata Dal (U) do this."

The comments of Rahul, vice-president of Congress headed by his mother Sonia Gandhi, came a few days after a meeting of the Indian cabinet, presided by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, approved the ordinance.

The ordinance was designed to overturn a Supreme Court decision that lawmakers of national parliament and states' legislatures should be disqualified if they are convicted in criminal cases carrying jail terms of more than two years.

The ordinance, which must be signed by the president, allows convicted lawmakers to continue to participate in parliamentary proceedings but would bar them from voting or drawing salaries.

The ordinance was decried by the opposition as unconstitutional and con-

demned by anti-corruption activists who questioned the government's commitment to fight graft.

BJP leader Arun Jaitley said those responsible in the government for the ordinance on convicted lawmakers should resign in the wake of Rahul Gandhi's denunciation of the move.

"All I can say, this is a highly belated realisation of what constitutes nonsense and if the Congress party genuinely believes that this is a nonsense, then the heads which have produced this nonsense twice in a month before this country...this is the question of governance...then will those heads remain or will those heads roll?" questioned Jaitley.

The government has argued that the Supreme Court decision was "unfair," saying that politicians can often fall prey to conviction on "frivolous grounds" and should have the right to

appeal after convictions.

Rahul's public denunciation of the ordinance comes a day after President Pranab Mukherjee called three cabinet ministers -- home, law and parliamentary affairs -- and raised questions over the need for an ordinance on an issue on which there was no political consensus.

The president is understood to have asked the ministers what was the urgency to bring the ordinance when a bill was already pending before parliament on the issue.

Opposition parties like Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party (the "common man" party), headed by former government official-turned-politician Arvind Kejriwal, met President Mukherjee and asked him to reject the ordinance.

"Rahul Gandhi thinks everybody in the country is a fool. They themselves bring in the ordinance and then tear it up," tweeted Kejriwal.

Biman to spread

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spree planning to enhance it to 18 planes in the next two years, Steele said.

It would have 12 planes by March next year, he said, adding it was also "gracefully retiring" four aged DC-10 aircraft, one of which would go to a US aviation museum.

The airline, which now has two each of Boeing 777-300s, 737-800s aircraft, Airbus A-310s and DC-10s, would induct more B-777s, apart from having six Boeing 787 Dreamliners on order for deliveries by 2018, Steele said.

Biman was also considering using India as a "stop-over" to fly to "underserved" markets like Iraq and Afghanistan, utilising Fifth Freedom rights, he told newsmen.

These rights allow an airline to stop in a foreign country, pick up passengers from there and move on to a second country.

Steele said his mandate was to turnaround the loss-

making airline into a profitable entity by 2014-15 and "we are expecting to break even this fiscal" after making losses of \$75 million and \$25 million in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

Biman hopes to go into profit mode in 2014-15, and the airline was not looking for any financial bailout from the Bangladesh government to overcome its losses and its debt, he said.

Biman has had a major problem of providing customer care service in terms of punctuality of its flights. The punctuality was 39 percent last year but this year it has already gone up to 70 percent, he said, adding European airlines' normal punctuality rate is 75-80 percent.

Bangladesh government has agreed to allow Biman to go in for an initial public offer (IPO) after attaining profitability and is providing sovereign guarantee for its aircraft fleet expansion plans.

Long march ends today

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told several rallies at Phultala, Daulatpur, and Khalispur upazilas in Khulna as the "Save the Sundarbans" long march travelled from Jessore to the divisional city.

The press note on Thursday claimed that a few organisations were spreading propaganda against the government initiative (Rampal power plant) to "mislead people" over the scheme.

Like a mother, the Sundarbans protects the coastal people from natural disasters, mentioned Anu Muhammad.

He called upon all to protest any activities that would put the forest in peril.

Organised by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports, the long march was an attempt to get the government to cancel the project, just 14 kilometres off the world's largest mangrove forest.

More than 1,200 protesters set out on the long march from the capital's Jatiya Press

Club on Tuesday.

The long march reached Khulna yesterday evening and is expected to reach Rampal today, where it will wind up with a rally at Digraj.

Convener of the national committee Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah said people want electricity, but not at the cost of the Sundarbans, which provides livelihoods to thousands of people.

"The government must look for alternative methods and sites to set up the power plant," he headed.

The long march saw a higher attendance on the weekend yesterday as hundreds of environmentalists joined the programme from Jessore and Khulna to protest the government's decision to build a power plant near the Sundarbans.

Besides, many students and journalists from Dhaka kept arriving in Khulna throughout the day.

As the protesters travelled from Jessore to Khulna, leaders and activists of different

cultural organisations, leftist political parties and their student wings joined the processions and rallies at Phultala, Daulatpur, and Khalispur upazilas.

National committee leaders Khalequzzaman, Tipu Biswas, Mohammad Shah Alam, Saiful Huque, Ruhin Hossain Prince, Zonayed Saki, Abul Hasan Rubel were present at the rallies, among others.

When the national committee set out on the long march on Tuesday to save the Sundarbans, the government on the following day fixed October 22 for laying the foundation stone of the power plant.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Anu Muhammad, member secretary of the national committee, yesterday said they will announce fresh agitation programmes today at the rally at Digraj.

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

Indian SC for 'no' vote provision

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Voters so far have no right to reject candidates despite demands from social activists to create such a provision.

The court noted that at least 13 other countries followed the practice of "electronic abstention".

Negative voting had been in effect for the 2008 general elections in Bangladesh, but in 2009, the Awami League government annulled it.

The right to reject the choices will "foster purity in electoral politics", Sathasivam said.

Fresh parliamentary elections are due in India by May 2014.

Veteran anti-graft activist and Gandhian Anna Hazare, who had led a countrywide street campaign against corruption by going on a hunger strike two years ago, has been a

votary of the right to reject candidates as well as recall an elected representative on the grounds of unsatisfactory performance.

The verdict, however, appeared to raise questions over what happens if a majority of electorate in a constituency vote negatively.

Election Commission sources said though the electoral law on the issue is silent, the new 'none of the above' option may virtually amount to an invalid vote and those getting the highest votes among the candidates will be declared winner.

The apex court said there is a "dire need" of negative voting which will bring "systemic change" in the election process as "the political parties will be forced to accept the will of the people" and field clean

candidates when a large number of people express their disapproval with the candidates being put up by them.

It said casting of the vote is a facet of the right of expression of an individual and the said right is provided under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution and "not allowing a person to cast vote negatively defeats the very freedom of expression and the right ensured in Article 21 i.e., the right to liberty".

While ruling Congress and main opposition BJP reacted cautiously to the verdict, CPI(M) said it had created an "abnormal situation" that needed to be corrected.

The apex court said negative voting would accelerate effective political participation of people and

would "foster the purity of the electoral process" and "it serves a very fundamental and essential part of a vibrant democracy".

"For democracy to survive, it is essential that the best available men should be chosen as people's representatives for proper governance of the country. This can be best achieved through men of high moral and ethical values, who win the elections on a positive vote.

"Thus in a vibrant democracy, the voter must be given an opportunity to choose 'none of the above' button, which will indeed compel the political parties to nominate a sound candidate. This situation palpably tells us the dire need of negative voting," the bench said in its 50-page verdict.

Gas crisis deepens

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daily shortfall of 20 million cubic feet (mmcf) this month, compared to the past few months and also September last year. And it is the domestic users and the CNG pumps that are bearing the brunt of this.

Such a shortfall, however, should not have been that big since Titas deals with more than 1,400 mmcf of gas -- more than half the country's gas distribution. But a top official of the company says this 20 mmcf is on top of a steady shortfall of 200 mmcf of gas within the Titas areas.

"Everything is so tight that a little drop in supply causes the gas pressure to drop," he said.

The Fenchuganj field is expected to resume operation in mid-October, and the situation is not likely to improve before that.

But utter lawlessness prevails centring on illegal

gas connections, which are contributing much to the problem.

"Through surveys and field information, we gather that there is massive pilferage of gas in Rupganj, Siddhirganj, Keraniganj, Araihaaz, Sonargaon, Savar, Dhaka Beribadh, Mirpur, Nandipara and Matuail," said the Titas high official.

But Titas officials are unable to disconnect the illegal lines. Mobs, backed by local influential people who help install these illegal lines, even beat up Titas officials when they go there to disconnect the lines. A general manager of Titas was assaulted and had to be hospitalised for 10 days in recent months.

"We face unusual resistance even when magistrates, Rab personnel and other law enforcers are with us," said the official, citing the instance of a mob chas-

ing a Titas team in Rupganj recently.

In the face of a shortfall in production, the government in mid-2010 imposed a ban on new gas connection. Earlier this year, the Petrobangla chairman hammered on lifting the ban, saying there were many consumers who took connections illegally and they should be regularised. The government lifted the ban, saying the illegal consumers would be legalised first and that new applications would be considered later.

This announcement encouraged thousands more to obtain illegal lines. Eventually, so far, nearly 1,75,000 illegal consumers have been regularised.

"But we found that there were still many users in underdeveloped areas. People there even use PVC pipes to drain out gas, which is very dangerous," said the

Titas official.

Sometimes Titas employees and contractors were found involved in this illegal practice. Of late, Titas black-listed four contractors and transferred two of its employees in this connection.

In addition to this problem, the age-old distribution lines have developed leakages in many areas of the capital. Titas is unable to replace those for lack of funds.

While some Petrobangla officials argue that the gas shortfall has been triggered by its excessive use in the power sector, the reality is many power plants are producing less power than their capacity due to gas shortage.

"Gas supply to power sector remains around 489 mmcf per day. It did not increase much compared to that in last year," said the Titas official.

Six held for anti-state propaganda on Facebook

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested six leaders of Islami Shashantantra Chhatra Andolan on Thursday afternoon for allegedly propagating on Facebook against the state and the government.

The arrestees are the organisation's president Md Ariful Islam, 25, its literary affairs secretary Md Rahmatullah, 23, madrasa affairs secretary Md Imdadullah, 25, publications affairs secretary Abdur Rahman, 24, metropolitan unit madrasa affairs secretary Md Sirajul Islam, 23, and central leader Sheikh Md Maruf, 24.

The elite force detained them during a raid at the organisation's headquarters on the second floor of Noakhali Tower in the capital's Purana Paltan, said Rab-3 assistant superintendent Md Anisuzzaman.

He said, "The arrestees had long been posting anti-government, anti-state and provocative materials on the organisation's Facebook page.

A post on the group's official website <http://www.iscabd.org> says, "The government again proved itself pro-atheist by releasing the atheist bloggers."

The outfit uploaded satirical articles against the prime minister and home minister, said sources at the elite force.

The detainees had also been running a hate campaign against the organisers of anti-war criminal platform Gonojagoron Mancha, terming them atheists.

"There is no place for atheists in Bangladesh," reads a Facebook post of Rahmatullah.

During primary interrogation, the detainees had admitted to propagating against the state and the government, said ASP Anisuzzaman, adding, "Legal actions will be taken against them."