

BLACKOUT Probe to take 10 more days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The probe committee is yet to find out the exact reason behind Saturday's 10-hour nationwide blackout but the state minister for power has held some technical faults in the internal grid responsible for the power outage.

"There was no technical glitch at Bheramara or Ashuganj power stations," Nasrul Hamid told a press conference at his ministry yesterday.

Hamid however could not say exactly where the problem had originated.

The press conference was arranged after the eight-member committee formed following the country's worst blackout in seven years submitted its primary investigation report to the ministry yesterday.

The panel also sought 10 more days for further investigations, Hamid said.

Replying to a query, he said the probe was taking time as the committee could not get records from some power stations in time as these were yet to be digitalised.

There should be a comprehensive investigation into the matter so that such incidents are not repeated in the future, the state minister said.

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Huji top-notch Abu Bakar Siddique, sentenced to death for Ramna Batamul carnage, being escorted to media briefing at the Rab headquarters yesterday.

VERDICT IN NIZAMI CASE Pak diplomat summoned over minister's comments

DIPLomatic CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka yesterday summoned the acting high commissioner of Pakistan and strongly protested Islamabad's reaction to the recent verdict of war criminal Motiur Rahman Nizami, terming it "direct interference" in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

In an aide-memoire to the envoy Ahmad Hussain Dayo, the government deplored the comments made by a senior and important cabinet member of Pakistan government regarding the verdict by the International Crimes Tribunal, Bangladesh without appreciating the true perspective.

Dhaka, while conveying its disappointment, asked the government of Pakistan to take serious note of the protest.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan in a statement on November 1 expressed concern over the death sentence to Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami.

Nisar said, "Though what happened in Bangladesh was that

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Bribe for everything

MANPOWER SHORTAGE IN HEALTH SECTOR			
CLASS	APPROVED POSTS	RECRUITED	VACANT POSTS
First Class			
Doctors	22,120	15,922	6,198
Non-doctors	490	216	274
Second Class	15,421	12,411	3,010
Third Class	51,878	43,960	7,918
Fourth Class	26,026	20,808	5,218
TOTAL	115,935 (100%)	93,317 (80%)	22,618 (20%)

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Responding to a query, Iftekharuzzaman said the anomalies found in the study are not applicable for all doctors or officials, but these are common phenomena in the sector.

"Healthcare could have been much better had we checked the anomalies."

BRIBERY

The range of bribes for recruitment, transfers or promotions is Tk 10,000 to Tk 10 lakh, said Taslima Akhter, TIB Programme Manager (Research and Policy), who presented the report titled "Governance challenges in health sector and the way forward".

"In some cases, more people are recruited than is required. Even bribe is collected just on an assurance of recruitment," she said.

Besides, political influence and lobbying are used for transfer or remaining in a privileged facility for longer period. For promotion of teachers, experience, seniority and publications are often not considered.

"Some officials or physicians get training facilities not necessary for them."

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT PURCHASE

The government often had bought unnecessary equipment, which remained unused for lack of manpower and necessary infrastructures.

Certain officials of the National Electro-Medical Equipment Maintenance Workshop get commission and provide no objection certificates with the connivance of Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) officials to issue work orders to private companies only for making money.

Often, contractors in league with the authorities concerned get their payments for repairing hospital buildings without ensuring quality of the work.

DIETS AND MEDICINES

Suppliers of patient diet at hospitals are selected on the basis of political influence, said Taslima Akhter.

"Though the lowest bidder gets the supply order, prices of some items remain higher than the market prices. Some items are also not supplied as per bidding documents," she said.

Hospitals in many cases are supplied with medicine not as per the demand or that with shorter lifetime. Authorities sometimes buy drugs at higher prices

from non-listed companies.

LEGAL ISSUES

The watchdog found that laws are often not enforced effectively.

For example, the National Health Policy-2011 speaks of keeping diagnosis costs in the private sector at tolerable level, but no initiative has been taken yet, Taslima Akhter said.

Laws have limitations regarding action against the doctors for their negligence, but amendments to overcome those have not been made yet.

As per the law, the DGHS is supposed to regularly inspect the private clinics, but it is not done, Taslima said.

Often, private practitioners charge fees that are too high and private diagnostic centres provide fake test results.

Doctors sometimes use designations not recognised by the regulatory authority -- Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council -- only to cheat the patients.

Talking to reporters, Iftekharuzzaman said the gradual decline of budget for the sector is also a matter of concern. Health budget in 2008-09 was 6.58 percent of national budget but has declined to 4.60 percent now.

Besides, he said, there are shortage of physicians and health workers.

The TIB executive director urged the government to increase the health budget, strengthen monitoring of private hospitals and clinics and enhance facilities to ensure that doctors continue to work in the rural areas.

TIB Deputy Executive Director Dr Sumaiya Khair, Director (research and policy) Rafiqul Islam, Senior Manager Shahzada M Akram were also present during the presentation.

SWEEPING ALLEGATIONS?

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim said TIB always makes sweeping allegations without providing specific proofs.

In response to queries by reporters after a programme at the ICDDR,B, he however said he would look into the TIB report and will take action if it has anything specific against any person involved in corruption.

Referring to the recent recruitment of some 6,000 doctors, Nasim said there was no scope for lobbying or corruption.

People are getting free healthcare in all the public hospitals and community clinics where there is no room for bribery, the health minister said.

Death row convict Huji man held

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and was paraded before the media at the Rab headquarters in the capital's Uttara yesterday.

At the press briefing, Rab Media Wing Director Commander Mufti Mahmud Khan said Siddique was a close associate of top Huji leader Mufti Abdul Hannan, another death row convict in the Ramna carnage case.

Siddique had been living in Keraniganj after hiding his identity, added the Rab official.

A Dhaka court in June handed the death penalty to eight Huji operatives,

including Hannan and Siddique, and life term imprisonment to six others in the Ramna carnage case. The carnage took place during the Pahela Baishakh celebrations in 2001.

During primary interrogation, Siddique told the elite force that he got acquainted with Mufti Hannan in 1992 when he was a student at Gawhardanga Hafizia Madrasa at Tungipara in Gopalganj.

"He [Hannan] used to visit the madrasa frequently and give lectures on his experience with Afghan militants. He used to motivate the students and

teachers," Siddique told the briefing.

Rab official Mahmud said thus motivated by Hannan, Siddique actively took part in both the Ramna carnage and the 21 August grenade attack in 2004.

The gruesome attack killed 24 people and injured scores.

Siddique protested his innocence in both the cases. He, however, said he was at the August 21 rally. He came to Dhaka from Kishoreganj around 12:30pm that day after a certain Kajal Ahmed called him for an "important job".

He claimed Kajal then introduced him with the then president of Awami

Olama League. They offered Asar prayers together at the Jatiya Press Club mosque. He then marched towards the rally venue in a procession of the Olama League.

"I sat about five feet away from the barricade. Suddenly I heard huge blasts. I ran away and took shelter at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. After offering Maghrib prayers there I headed for Kishoreganj," said Siddique.

He said he got introduced with Kajal, a Huji leader, at Baitul Mukarram mosque earlier that year.

Poor show in education

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The survey was done on 7,143 class-VI and 7,169 class-VIII students of 309 schools and madrasas in 30 upazilas under the SEQAEP project. Teachers of different colleges conducted the main assessment survey on December 27 last year.

Thirty students each from class-VI and VIII of the educational institutions were chosen on the basis of systematic sampling.

They answered some basic questions on selected subjects. Eighty percent of those were in multiple choice format and the rest were short questions.

"It was not a typical test. It had nothing to do with class exams. We tried to assess the students' competence level with questions on cognitive knowledge," M&E Director Prof Md Didarul Alam told The Daily Star.

The survey had set five bands of competence in each of the three subjects. Every band demonstrates a certain level of competence and current standard of learning.

Band-4 shows the desired level of competence achieved by class-VI and class-VIII students while Band-5 reflects level of competence higher than the expected level. Band-1, 2 and 3 show subsequent low levels of competence.

Most sixth graders achieved Band-2 level while a large number of eighth graders fell in Band-3.

Speaking to The Daily Star, a number of educationists said pass rates in public exams are getting higher. But a huge number of students fail to gain the desired level of competence due to flawed teaching systems and a lack of skilled teachers.

They blamed inadequate teaching and infrastructural facilities, and insufficient budget allocations for the gloomy picture.

The secondary education system is beset with problems, Rasheda K Choudhury, former primary education adviser to a caretaker government, told this correspondent.

"We have problems in classroom teaching. We don't have enough skilled teachers especially in remote areas. There are questions over the recruitment of

CLASS-VI (IN %)			
SUBJECTS	BELOW LEVEL	DESIRED LEVEL	ABOVE LEVEL
English	92	7	1
Bangla	89	10	1
Mathematics	82	13	5

CLASS-VIII (IN %)			
SUBJECTS	BELOW LEVEL	DESIRED LEVEL	ABOVE LEVEL
English	66	23	11
Bangla	51	38	11
Mathematics	65	22	13

teachers. Many schools do not have adequate laboratory and library facilities. Moreover, teachers are poorly paid. These all lead to this situation."

Rasheda, also executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said the government's regulatory mechanism for privately-managed secondary schools is very weak, and that is why things go unchecked.

Above all, it is a matter of investment. "We have to invest more in education," she said.

According to the survey, boys did better than girls in gaining competence in the three subjects in class VI. However, girls of class-VIII did slightly better in Bangla, but lagged behind in English and mathematics.

It showed students from which regions gained adequate competence. Both Class-VI and VIII students in Barisal, followed by Comilla, are well ahead of others in the three subjects. In Barisal, more than 41 percent of class-VI students have adequate competence in mathematics against 58 percent of class-VIII students.

Students of Sylhet are at the bottom of the chart, as only one percent of class-VI students achieved the desired level of competence in English. And only 10 percent of class-VIII students have proficiency in the subject.

Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam of English department at Dhaka University said

BSF men beat Bangladeshi boy to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force yesterday beat to death a 14-year-old Bangladeshi boy on Johorpur border in the district's Sadar upazila.

Deceased Liton Miah was son of Anwarul Islam in Belpara village of the upazila.

The BSF members of Pirojpur camp under 20 Malda BSF Battalion caught Liton around 12:00 noon when he, along with another boy, was cutting grass inside Indian territory, said Lt Col Abu Zafor Sheikh Mohammad Bazul Haque, commanding officer of 9 Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Battalion there.

The BSF troops then beat up Liton heavily and left him at the zero line of the frontier in a critical condition. However, the other managed to escape.

Finding Liton, locals took him to his house with the help of BGB men where Liton died later.

On information, police came to the spot and sent the body to Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Meanwhile, the BGB sent a protest note to its Indian counterpart, condemning the killing, the BGB official added.

Security not an issue

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was called by the party itself in protest at the capital punishment of another party leader Mir Quasem Ali for his crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

They said they went there to know what their client wanted them to do in the next course of action after the Supreme Court upheld his death penalty awarded by the war crimes tribunal.

Motiur Rahman Akand, one of the four counsels who met Kamaruzzaman, told The Daily Star that they went to the jail in "an emergency situation."

The ally of the BNP-led opposition enforced consecutive hartals since October 30, excluding the weekends and Tuesday for Ashura, protesting the recent verdicts in war crimes cases against its leaders.

During the hartal hours on Wednesday, the Daily Star correspondent saw Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, another counsel of Kamaruzzaman, leave the Supreme Court premises in an ambulance after a press briefing on the SC verdict.

Counsels of war crimes accused Jamaat leaders invariably stayed off the cases' hearings on hartal days before the January 5 election.

The prosecution lawyers termed it "dilatory tactics" to drag the long-awaited trial in what they said was an effort to get advantage of the event of a change of government.

The defence counsels discontinued the practice after the national election.

Several counsels of Jamaat leader Abdus Subhan participated in the proceedings of the International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday.

No action yet

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happened with us is beyond our imagination," he said.

He filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station accusing four unknown persons.

Nobody has been arrested yet.

Contacted, DU acting proctor Prof Amzad Ali said he heard about the incident. "We are working to find out the attackers."

One of the nieces told The Daily Star, "We were sitting by the Shahidullah Hall pond [near Curzon Hall].

"The four came and asked us

whether we are students. As we replied in the negative, they just said the place is not a hangout and started beating us."

Her younger sister, who graduated from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of DU, had been in Canada for two and a half years. Returning home recently, she wanted to visit the campus.

"My parents were students of the university and my younger sister graduated from the IBA. We have deep feelings for the university and we knew Curzon Hall as one of the safest places to hang around," said the

elder sister, a graduate from the University of Texas.

The whole incident lasted about five minutes. Several small groups were there but none said a word, she added.

"Nobody even replied to our queries on the attackers' identities. Later from newspaper reports, we came to know that they [the four] were Chhatra League activists."

Aminul Islam, president of Shahidullah Hall Chhatra League, said if they could identify the four, they would give the names to the university authorities.