

# No deal to import coal from India

Says Nasrul Hamid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Power and Energy Nasrul Hamid yesterday said Bangladesh was not having any deal with India to import coal, as reported by Indian news agency PTI.

"We did not talk with India about coal supply for Rampal power plant. We have a consultant whose job is to source high quality coal either from Indonesia or Australia," he told The Daily Star.

The Indian state minister for petroleum and natural gas visited Dhaka in April and held a meeting with Nasrul. "We didn't discuss about coal sourcing for the Rampal project. There has been no dialogue with India on this issue," Nasrul added.

The PTI on Tuesday reported that India's coal company CIL was in "deep consultation" with Bangladesh to export coal.

PTI said the move came as the CIL was now left with 80 million tonnes of coal in its inventory due to a sharp decline of its demand.

Indian Coal Secretary Anil Swarup told the media, "We are already into it and they [CIL] are in very deep

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates "Food-Friendly Programme for the Ultra Poor" at Thanarhat AU Pilot High School in Kurigram's Chilmari yesterday. Under the programme, food grains are on sale at government-fixed low prices.

PHOTO: PID

# None would

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Officials said special cards would get 30 kg rice a month for five months -- March, April, September, October and November -- every year.

Hasina, the then opposition leader, during her visit to the munga-hit northern districts on November 8, 2005 had pledged to end the plight of local people if the Awami League came to power.

Accordingly, her previous government after taking office in 2009 had started implementing several social safety net programmes to alleviate poverty in the northern districts. Distribution of rice at Tk 10 per kilogram is the latest one.

The food secretary said the government has allocated Tk 2,100 crore for the programme, with a subsidy of Tk 27 in each kg of rice.

The food ministry has already prepared a policy and allocated 5.5 lakh tonnes of rice for smooth operation of the programme from September to November this year and March to April next year.

Speaking at the rally, the PM said five crore people have graduated to middle-income class from lower-income class, thanks to various pragmatic steps of the present government.

"We have cut the poverty rate to 22 percent from 57 percent in the last seven and a half years and our target is to reduce the rate by at least seven or eight percent by 2021," she added.

Hasina, also the AL president, said the government has been working tirelessly to change people's fortune. She reiterated her pledge to celebrate the golden jubilee of the country's independence by establishing Bangladesh as a hunger and poverty-free nation by 2021.

"Our ultimate goal is to turn Bangladesh into a hunger and poverty-free prosperous country as dreamt by Bangabandhu.... We have a firm belief that the nation would be able to achieve the goal, Insha Allah."

About launching "Food-Friendly Programme for the Ultra Poor" from Chilmari, the PM said this area was once known as famine-prone. But the bad name has been cleared due to various steps taken by the government.

She called upon all, including parents, guardians, and teachers, to stay alert so that none can get involved in terrorism, militancy and drug addiction.

Accusing the BNP-Jamaat of patronising terrorism and militancy, she said a terrible situation was created in the country due to emergence of terrorism and militancy during the misrule of the BNP-Jamaat.

The AL government tackled the social menaces with an iron hand after coming to power in 2009, she added.

The PM said some incidents occurred recently in the country, and the law enforcement agencies stamped out culprits by carrying out successful drives.

The government was able to resolve the Gulshan café hostage crisis in just 10 hours through eliminating the militants and rescuing 13 hostages alive.

About the war crimes trial, Hasina said Bangladesh is being freed from a stigma as the government executed killers of the Father of the Nation and is implementing the judgments against war criminals who had killed intellectuals, freedom fighters and tortured women during the Liberation War.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Mashiur Rahman Ranga and State Minister for Social Welfare Nuruzzaman Ahmed spoke at the rally, among others, with Food Minister Qamrul Islam in the chair.

Later, the premier inaugurated the food distribution programme by handing over special cards and rice to 15 people.

# Concern rooted in lack of understanding

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bureaucracy. We do not properly market our ideas. Specially in the power and energy ministry which is too preoccupied with projects.

But led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself, we have taken an initiative to address how to handle public communication better -- especially on development works. We have become engaged in social media. We have a Facebook page and our own website that posts news daily.

We have made big changes in the last one year. We have been active in social media for the last one or two months.

Previously, information on Rampal was made available on our websites -- but it did not get attention. The environment ministry had put up the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report at its website. The environment ministry scrutinized the report for one year.

The critics (of the project) also have a responsibility. They must understand what we are trying to say. Many of them do not do their homework on the technology aspect of the project.

**TDS: People do not feel they can take the government seriously on this issue due to a number of reasons. The government had taken many steps including laws and projects on wildlife preservation and the protection of the Sundarbans from the late nineties. But over the years, these steps failed to improve the health of the forest. Now there are industrial plots there. The number of tigers dropped to 105 from 450. Petroleum carrying barges sink in the rivers of the Sundarbans. When the government is failing to uphold its laws and intents there, how can the people trust the government on the Rampal project?**

**Hamid:** In the sixties, the Mongla port used to handle the bulk of coal supplies. Coal was imported and unloaded at Mongla and it was shipped across the country through the rivers of the Sundarbans. Have you heard that the Sundarbans was destroyed by that? Did its water become polluted?

The destruction of the Sundarbans over the decades was not due to coal. From the seventies onwards, governments allowed more exploitation of the forest. Increasing number of tourists is going there. People go there on picnics playing loud music. These are the concerns of the environment ministry. Our ministry's concern is to see if this plant would have cumulative negative effect on the environment.

Technical people understand the project but non-technical people are having a difference of opinion because their concern is of a broad nature.

The plant will emit Sulphur Dioxide (SOx). But how much of it will go into the air is the issue. But they (critics) are not focusing on this. They should see whether the emitted SOx would destroy the Sundarbans or not. They should see whether we can control the emission of Nitrogen Oxide (NOx). They should see whether the ash generated by the power plant would be released through the plant's chimney.

The fact is, coal plants generate these elements. There will be sulphur. But will

this sulphur affect the Sundarbans 14 km away? Critics say the plant will release 57 tonnes of SOx every day. Will so much SOx get released to the atmosphere? If this does not happen and the emission level is brought down to a tolerable level, then why are we saying that the Sundarbans will be destroyed? This is what we are trying to tell them repeatedly.

Those dealing with technical aspects have told us that if we follow the specifications then this will be a great power plant and it would not affect the Sundarbans.

So, can we run the plant with the promised technology? Of course! That's why we have appointed a German consultant. We are not completely depending on ourselves because we lack experience in coal power. To get experience we have entered into a joint venture with Indian NTPC. We have taken 50-50 equity. The implementation of the project will be ensured by our own engineers -- the German consultant.

This would not be the only such power plant in the country. We are building a minimum of 15 such power plants. This means there will be at least \$20 billion investment.

Using good technology means lower emissions. The people must trust the government in building so many plants. We have taken plans to develop human resources to run so many plants. I have also been in the trainings. I have been to Japan to see ultra-super critical coal power plant. When I entered the plant, I thought the plant was shut off because I could see no smoke from the chimney. I asked about it and they said the plant was running. I also could not hear any noise louder than what you hear in this room when I was near the turbine.

People consider coal as dirty. We cite examples of old coal power plants of the USA. It is not right to compare those plants with the ultra super critical plants.

**TDS: But in case of a disaster like the one in the Ha Long Bay in Vietnam (where a coal plant was built close to a world heritage site), what can the government guarantee for the safety of the forest?**

**Hamid:** Disasters happen. But should we stop development works? What happened at Ha Long Bay was a natural disaster. There was an open pit coal mine that was flooded leading to a crisis. This is not applicable to the Sundarbans.

There are 850 brick kilns around Dhaka city. The level of carbon and sulphur emission from these is 1000 times higher than our (planned) power plant because they use poor quality coal and also because the coal is burnt openly without any filters. But did these kill the trees of Dhaka? There are many brick kilns in Mirpur. Did they kill the tigers of the zoo there? I believe, in broader sense, it's the cleanest energy of all.

**TDS: This is primarily an Indo-Bangla joint venture; but only Bangladesh has provided sovereign guarantee to secure the loan. Don't you think this looks like India**

shrugged off its part of the deal and it does not reflect friendship and trust here?

**Hamid:** In monetary sense, India holds 50 percent equity. The remaining matters are all within Bangladesh. Who would buy the power? Who would control the supply chain? Everything is Bangladesh's responsibility. Then who should guarantee the total funding? Bangladesh should give this.

**TDS: The site was chosen by the government out of three potential spots in the same region before the company was formed. It should have been the company's task. All these sites are close to the Sundarbans. Why did the government do so?**

**Hamid:** The site was pre-selected by our experts looking at several issues like human replacement, accessibility to water, nearby port where vessels already ply etc. In Khulna, on an average 60 to 70 vessels ply in the (Sundarbans) water every day. Whereas, we'll use only one and a half vessel (on average) every day. This is nothing compared to the current traffic. The river is 3 km wide here. One vessel plying through such a wide river is nothing.

The southwestern region is one of the most neglected areas. Poverty is most prevalent in Patuakhali, Barisal and the rest of the southern region.

Besides, when the Padma bridge opens, there would be a tremendous surge of activities. There would be a huge number of industries and a rise in power demand. This has been incorporated in our master plan outlining how much power would be needed in the coming years. We need to properly distribute power generation. It would not be cost effective to supply power to Barisal from Matarbari. Therefore, the mega plants have been distributed that way. Matarbari and Maheshkhali would be a hub; Khulna another hub; then more will be in Payra, Rangpur and so on. We are creating a ring all around the country where large plants would be built.

This would make the power system healthy and cost effective in the future.

The Khulna belt will become a major area in the future. Other than the Padma bridge, an airport will be built in Barisal. If you consider (the power demand in the) years 2040 or 2060, a 1300 mw power plant would be nothing. The power demand there will be 5000 to 6000 mw.

**TDS: With development, people will then encroach into the forest and make it their property--isn't it?**

**Hamid:** We will take care of the protected areas. We will include nature in our development. Bangladesh is a very small densely populated country. We would not be able to make Bangladesh a carbon-negative country like Bhutan even if we tried but environment is surely a major concern. The public concern over Rampal project has helped us to be more cautious about the technology aspect and other aspect of the project.

(Nasrul Hamid, MP, is the honourable state minister for the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources.)

# INT'L LITERACY DAY

## Confusion remains over literacy rate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh celebrates the International Literacy Day today with confusion reigning over the literacy rate in the country.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman yesterday said the rate now stood at 71 percent.

"According to our age-wise survey, the literacy rate is 71 percent," he told reporters at a press briefing at his ministry on the eve of the day.

Asked what age this percentage represents, he said it was a total average.

A year ago, the minister announced that the country's literacy rate was 61 percent.

Claiming that the government achieved 100 percent literacy rate in many areas this year, he said this estimate is not highlighted in various forums.

There has been a serious confusion over the actual literacy rate for the last several years with the ministers and government officials coming up with conflicting figures on this particular

occasion each year.

In 2014, Mostafizur Rahman at a similar briefing claimed that the literacy rate was 65 percent, without explaining how he got the figure. At the same programme, the then secretary Kazi Akhtar Hossain said the literacy rate was "almost 70 percent".

In 2013, the then primary and mass education minister Afsarul Ameen claimed that the literacy rate stood at 71 percent, though he did not explain how he had come up with the number. The previous year, his deputy, Motahar Hossain, had said the rate was over 60 percent.

During yesterday's press briefing, the ministry officials distributed a written statement among the newsmen. The statement stated September 8 as the International Mother Language Day.

As the minister started reading out the statement, reporters corrected him. "Who wrote this...?" he exclaimed.

Offering apology, he started reading out the statement.

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# SC stays

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Board of Revenue (NBR) to refund the money collected from the institutions from 2007 as income tax under the statutory regulatory orders issued by the government, Deputy Attorney General Rashed S Jahangir told The Daily Star.

Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice Mirza Hussain Haider passed the order after the hearing on a petition filed by the government seeking stay on the HC verdict.

The chamber judge asked the government to file a leave-to-appeal petition in two months with the Appellate Division against the HC

verdict.

Following 46 writ petitions, the HC on September 5 declared illegal the government orders that imposed 15 percent income tax on the private educational institutions.

The court also scrapped the three statutory regulatory orders for tax imposition issued by the government in 2007 and 2010.

Following the SC order, barrister Omar Sadat and barrister Sakawat Hossain, lawyers of the writ petitioners, told The Daily Star that their clients need not pay the income tax since the SC did not stay the effectiveness of the full HC verdict.

# Stranded for hours on highways

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Mymensingh and Dhaka-Sylhet highways witnessed less or no traffic jam, reports our district correspondents quoting highway police officials as saying.

Meanwhile, strong current washed away a ferry landing station that was supposed to open shortly. The ferry station was closed since Monday morning.

The authorities on Monday claimed that they made good progress towards reinstalling the landing station.

It became uncertain as to whether the authorities would be able to operate two ferry ghats on Daulatdia part ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, said officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

## SUFFERINGS ON DHAKA-TANGAIL HIGHWAY

Vehicles were moving at a snail's pace on the highway amid huge traffic jam from 10:00am, said sources in the highway police and transport workers.

Lack of lavatories on the highway increased the sufferings manifold of home-bound passengers, especially women and children, they said.

A huge number of capital-bound cattle-laden trucks, empty trucks that were returning and rain added to the traffic situation at some points of the 64-km highway, sources said.

Mazharul Islam, an employee of a

private firm in Dhaka, said it took him eight hours to reach Tangail.

He set out at 6:00am from the capital's Mohakhali and reached Tangail around 2:30pm. Usually the journey takes three hours.

Mahbub Alam, superintendent of Tangail police, said, "The pressure of additional vehicles moving on the highway due to the suspension of ferries at the Paturia ghat made the situation worse."

He said that more law enforcers had been engaged this year to ensure smooth vehicular movement on the highway.

"Police are patrolling after every two kilometers and internet protocol cameras have been installed at ten spots along the highway to monitor the situation," he said, adding that community police began working yesterday and volunteers would be engaged from September 10 to facilitate smooth journey of the holiday makers.

**DHAKA-CHITTAGONG HIGHWAY** People travelling to Chittagong and Dhaka through the highway had to face terrible traffic jam from early morning until afternoon in Munshiganj.

Two road accidents at Voberchar of Gazaria upazila, a covered van's becoming out of order on Meghna bridge and people rushing towards home contrib-

uted to a more-than-13-kilometer standstill on the highway.

A pick-up driver named Rajib was killed in a head-on collision with a covered van at Bausia Pakirmore under Gazaria upazila.

**DHAKA-PATURIA HIGHWAY** Less number of vehicles plied the Dhaka-Paturia highway yesterday to avoid long wait at the ferry terminal, as two out of four terminals remained closed since Monday morning.

There was no traffic jam on the 48-kilometer highway, said Anwar Hossain, an inspector of Manikganj Traffic office.

"We waited for two and a half hours at the Paturia ghat as there were less vehicles waiting for ferry service," said Magura-bound passenger Hasan Sayeed who crossed the Padma river around 3:45pm.

People waited at least 4-10 hours in the last couple of days to get ferry services and there were long queues of vehicles stranded on both sides of the river.

**DHAKA-MAWA HIGHWAY** The Dhaka-Mawa highway had no traffic congestion yesterday and the ferry services were smooth on both sides of the Mawa-Kewrakandi route. A total of 17 ferries were operating non-stop.

Our Manikganj correspondent Zahangir Shah and Munshiganj correspondent Farhana Mirza Barna also contributed to this report.

# Zia's medal removed

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In 2003, the then BNP-Jamaat four-party alliance government gave the Swadhinata Padak, the highest civil award, to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman for their role in the Liberation War and nation building.

Then main opposition in parliament, the Awami League, had strongly criticised the government's move and refused to

accept the award. They had said that giving award to Bangabandhu and Zia was a conspiracy to compare the two on a same scale.

As the AL refused the award, the government had then sent the medals and citation papers to the National Museum for display.

On August 24, the cabinet committee on national award affairs in a meeting

recommended revoking Zia's Swadhinata Padak and removing medal and documents from the museum.

The BNP on several occasions had said it would be suicidal for the AL if it revoked Zia's Swadhinata Padak.

Sources at the museum said the medal and other accessories had been in the museum store before they were taken away yesterday.