

HIKING POWER PRICE BERC opens public hearing tomorrow

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) will hold public hearings in two phases from tomorrow on increasing prices of electricity at bulk and retail levels.

The hearings will be held from September 25 to 28 and October 2 to 4 at the TCB Bhaban in the city's Karwan Bazar, according to a BERC statement.

All companies and agencies from the power sector have already submitted proposals to the BERC and the regulator has formally accepted the proposals.

The state-owned Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board have sent a proposal to the BERC to change the rates of power tariff.

The BPDB also sent another proposal to the commission asking to increase the retail price of electricity by Tk 0.72 per unit (kilo-watt-hour).

Besides, the Dhaka Power Distribution Company, Dhaka Electric Supply Company, West-Zone Power Distribution Company and North West Zone Power Distribution Company have sent their proposals to the BERC in this regard.



Rohingya refugees scuffle as aid is distributed in Cox's Bazar yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

New Zealand polls ends in stalemate

AFP, Wellington

The New Zealand general election ended in stalemate on Saturday with official results showing the minority New Zealand First (NZF) party in a position to play kingmaker and in no hurry to decide which major party it will support.

It could be at least another two weeks before the outcome is known after Prime Minister Bill English's National party fell just short of confirming a fourth-term in power.

The charismatic Jacinda Ardern, who revitalised the main opposition Labour Party, also failed to muster sufficient numbers.

With 61 seats required to govern, National won 58 and its sole remaining political ally, ACT secured one, according to the New Zealand Electoral Commission.

Labour won 45 seats with its political partner Green on seven.

Leader of NZF Winston Peters gave no indication which of the two blocs his New Zealand First -- and its nine seats from 7.5 percent of the vote -- would support.

"As things stand we do have the balance of political responsibility and we're not going to be hasty with that," Peters told supporters.

"We'll make a decision in the interests of all New Zealand and New Zealand First, that is the whole country, not ourselves in the party but in the national interest and that will take some time."

A haven

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specialists and painters. It takes an average of 10 months for a new vessel to be complete, with older ships also repaired and refurbished at the dockyards.

"I have brought my vessel to Nesarabad for repairs," says Sheikh Sagar Ahmed from Gopalganj, "Labour and other costs are more reasonable in this area."

"Customers are drawn to this upazila from across the district, from Barisal, Barguna and Patuakhali, even from Dhaka," notes boatbuilding entrepreneur Abdur Rashid. "Costs are lower here."

Construction contractor Masum Billah says his business is based on orders for boats. "Ship owners contract repairs and new vessels with us in advance," he says. "We will hire some dockyards on the Sandha River's bank or an adjacent canal in order to have the work completed. Depending on the vessel's size, the customer will have to pay up to Tk 500 per day in rent for dockyard space."

Yet despite Nesarabad's flourishing trade, there are no certified engineers working at the riverfront. "We work from experience," says one engine fitter, Md Shamsul Haque. "I have been doing this for 30 years. I don't have any formal training on shipbuilding."

Having been established in an ad hoc fashion, most of the area's shipyards are not well equipped. Some shipbuilder businessmen wish that the government would invest in key facilities to encourage Nesarabad's shipbuilding industry to flourish further.

Coup tweet

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Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the tweet, she compared the bloodshed in her menstrual cycle with that of the 249 people who lost their lives during the failed coup and are now celebrated in Turkey as martyrs.

"I am having my period this morning to celebrate the July 15 martyrs' day. I am celebrating the day by bleeding on behalf of our martyrs' blood," she wrote.

Organisers said they had seen the tweet after the beauty contest's results were announced and had to hold an hours-long meeting to verify the post.

Can Sandickioglu, head of Miss Turkey, said in a statement that the tweet was posted by Esen.

"The Miss Turkey organisation, whose objective is to promote Turkey in the world and to contribute to its image, cannot accept such a post," he announced.

Esen's title was handed to Asli Sumen, who came second and who will now represent Turkey in the Miss World contest in China on November 18.

In a message shared on her Instagram account, Esen said her post was written "carelessly" but was not politically motivated, apologising for any misunderstanding.

"I want to say that as a 18-year-old girl, I had no political aims while sharing this post," she wrote, saying that she only shared her "innocent thoughts during a sensitive time."

"My family raised me by teaching to respect our homeland and nation. I do not have a character that could show disrespect to our martyrs," she said.

Esen is not the first Turkish beauty queen to fall foul over a social media post.

In 2015, prosecutors launched an investigation against former Miss Turkey beauty queen Merve Buyuksarac on charges of insulting Erdogan through social media posts.

US bombers stage N Korea

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The North, which says it needs nuclear weapons to protect itself against the threat of a US invasion, responded on Friday with a rare personal rebuke from Kim, who called Trump "mentally deranged" and threatened the "highest level of hard-line countermeasure in history."

'KINDERGARTEN FIGHT'

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has described the rhetoric between leaders of the United States and North Korea as a "kindergarten fight between children" and urged calm.

"We have to calm down the hot heads and understand that we do need pauses, that we do need some contacts," Lavrov told a news conference at the United Nations where he was attending the annual General Assembly debate.

A shallow 3.5-magnitude earthquake hit North Korea near the country's nuclear test site yesterday, US seismologists said, in what Chinese experts said was a "suspected explosion", but Seoul deemed a "natural earthquake".

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) said the quake struck around 20 kilometres (12 miles) away from the North's nuclear test site, where earlier this month Pyongyang detonated its sixth and largest device, which it claimed to be a hydrogen bomb capable of being launched onto a missile.

"This event occurred in the area of the previous North Korean Nuclear tests. We cannot conclusively confirm at this time the nature (natural or human-made) of the event. The depth is poorly constrained and has been held to 5 km by the seismologist," USGS said in a statement.

Regional experts differed on their analysis of the tremor, with the China Earthquake Network Centre (CENC) service calling it a "suspected explosion" while Seoul's Korea Meteorological Agency (KMA) judged it a "natural quake".

The North's last test, on September 3, was the country's most powerful detonation, triggering a much stronger 6.3-magnitude quake that was felt across the border in China.

The test prompted global condemnation, leading the United Nations Security Council to unanimously adopt new sanctions that include

restrictions on oil shipments.

A UN-backed monitoring group said analysts were investigating yesterday's quake.

The strength of the quake was much lower than the tremors registered during any of North Korea's nuclear tests, including its first detonation in 2006, which triggered a 4.1-magnitude quake.

Washington announced tougher restrictions Friday aimed at curbing North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programme, building on tough new UN sanctions aimed at choking Pyongyang of cash.

Russia and China have both appealed for an end to the escalating rhetoric between Washington and Pyongyang.

But on the fringes of the UN meeting this week, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho upped the tensions further, telling reporters Pyongyang might now consider detonating a hydrogen bomb outside its territory.

Monitoring groups estimate that the nuclear test conducted in North Korea earlier this month had a yield of 250 kilotons, which is 16 times the size of the US bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

Hydrogen bombs, or H-bombs, are thermonuclear weapons far more powerful than ordinary fission-based atomic bombs, and use a nuclear blast to generate the intense temperatures required for fusion to take place.

Meanwhile, the North Korea's foreign minister assailed US Donald Trump at the United Nations yesterday, deriding him as a "mentally deranged" leader whose threats had increased the chances of military confrontation.

Ri Yong-ho told the general assembly that Trump's vow to "totally destroy" his country if necessary had made "our rockets' visit to the entire US mainland all the more inevitable."

Onlookers

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it. He rushed Achhia to the DMCH. However, it was already too late.

Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, told this correspondent last night that the reckless car fled immediately after the accident. "We are trying to identify the car owner."

Iran defies US, tests missile

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triggered US sanctions and accusations that they violate the spirit of the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers.

Iran, which fought a brutal war with neighbouring Iraq in the 1980s, sees missiles as a legitimate and vital part of its defence -- particularly as regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Israel import huge amounts of military hardware from the West.

Trump has threatened to bin the nuclear agreement, saying Iran is developing missiles that may be used to deliver a nuclear warhead when the deal's restrictions are lifted in 2025.

He is due to report to Congress on October 15 on whether Iran is still complying with the deal and whether it remains in US interests to stick by it.

If he decides that it is not, that could open the way for US lawmakers to reimpose sanctions, leading to the potential collapse of the agreement.

Trump said on Wednesday he had made his decision but was not yet ready to reveal it.

The other signatories to the deal -- Britain, France, Germany, China,

Russia and the EU -- have all pushed for it to continue.

EUROPEAN SUPPORT

They point out that abandoning the agreement will remove restrictions on Iran immediately -- rather than in eight years' time -- and that the International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed Tehran is meeting its commitments.

Iran says all of its missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only and has limited their range to a maximum of 2,000 kilometres, although commanders say they have the technology to go further.

That makes them only medium-range but still sufficient to reach Israel or US bases in the Gulf.

At Friday's military parade, President Hassan Rouhani hit out at those who "create problems for the peoples of our region every day and boast of selling arms to the bloodthirsty Zionist regime (Israel) which has been attacking the peoples of our region for 70 years like a cancerous tumour."

As well as carrying out missile tests, Iran has also launched a space satellite and fired missiles at Islamic State group targets in eastern Syria in recent months.

Passage

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According to the World Wildlife Fund, the conflict is a result of habitat loss and fragmentation. When elephants and humans interact, there is a conflict from elephant raids, leading to injuries and deaths of humans. Also, elephants are killed by humans for reasons other than ivory collection, it says.

A forest official said two Rohingyas died after being trampled by elephants last week.

Again, in the face of the conflict, elephants often stop using their usual migratory routes and in many cases, they start mating within their group, say experts.

Over 429,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, after violence broke out in their homeland in Myanmar's Rakhine on August 25.

Failing to get place in the registered camps, many of the refugees had to set up camps by the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway. Unfortunately, the camps blocked the elephant corridors in Ukhia.

In a month or so, forest officials said, over 4,500 acres of the reserve forest area in Ukhia had been completely destroyed in addition to the damages caused earlier.

Again, the government has recently allocated 2,000 acres of reserve forest land in Ukhia Ghat Mouja area for setting up a new camp for the Rohingyas.

Contacted, Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Md Ali Hossain said the government had no other option but to allocate the reserve forest land for the refugees. He said the administration had no khas land in its possession.

The inter-sector coordination group, a consortium of foreign donors, was working to build the camp, said forest officials.

Visiting the Ukhia Ghat Mouja, these correspondents saw that around one fifth of the 30,000 acres of land already had many new and old Rohingya settlements on it.

Similar camps were seen in Shilkhali and Whykang Moujas in Teknaf, and in private rubber plantation area in Naikhyangchhari of Bandarban.

A huge area of the reserve forest has been razed to the ground. Old clothes, plastic bottles, polythene bags remain scattered at places.

The district administration sources said many of the 14 new camps were blocking the elephant corridors, including those in Ukhia.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, several civil society members said the government should act faster to ensure that the natural elephant corridors are freed. They said it would help the animals migrate without any trouble.

French left to stage street showdown over Macron reforms

AFP, Paris

Tens of thousands of French leftists are expected to answer a call by firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon to throng the streets of Paris yesterday in protest over President Emmanuel Macron's sweeping reforms of the labour code.

The third in a series of nationwide protests comes a day after Macron signed his signature reforms into law using a fast-tracked procedure that avoided a lengthy parliamentary debate.

The changes to the labour code, which runs to around 3,400 pages in some editions, give small businesses more flexibility to negotiate pay and conditions with their staff, instead of being bound by national agreements.

They also make it easier to lay off employees and cap compensation awards for unfair dismissal while also giving higher payouts to workers made redundant.

Macron argues the changes -- the cornerstone of his programme aimed at boosting entrepreneurship -- will help bring down stubbornly high unemployment of 9.6 percent.

Merkel eyes fourth term

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Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has railed against the influx of around one million mostly Muslim migrants and refugees, half of them from war-torn Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The party with links to the far-right French National Front and Britain's UKIP has been polling at 11-13 percent and is expected to enter the opposition benches of the Bundestag, heightening its visibility and state financing.

The International Auschwitz Committee warned that the "conglomerate of anti-Semites, enemies of democracy and nationalistic agitators" will bring "an inhuman coldness" to the glass-domed chamber of the Reichstag building.

Merkel -- who has been heckled and booed as a "traitor" by AfD followers -- was nonetheless headed back into one of their strongholds yesterday, in her Baltic coast constituency where the anti-Islam party beat Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) in state elections last year.

At Merkel's final major stump speech on Friday evening in the southern city of Munich, activists tried to drown her out with whistles and vuvuzelas and chants of "get lost".

But the 63-year-old refused to be derailed from her stability-and-prosperity stump speech, telling the crowd that "the future of Germany will definitely not be built with whistles and hollers".

Schulz, for his part, recalled with pride the SPD's history of resisting the Nazi regime and told the Berlin rally that "this Alternative for Germany is no alternative. They are a shame for our nation."

Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, also a Social Democrat, warned that "for the first time since the end of the Second World War, real Nazis will sit in the German parliament".

One of two AfD leading candidates,

Alexander Gauland, has called for Germans to shed their guilt over two world wars and the Holocaust and to take pride in their veterans.

Aside from the hard-right populist noise, the past two months of campaigning by the major parties have been widely criticised as lacklustre and uninspired, with few hot-button issues dividing the main contenders.

For the past four years, Merkel's CDU has ruled Europe's top economy with the Social Democrats as its junior partner, a time during which both parties have broadly agreed on major policies, from eurozone and foreign policy to migration.

In a last-ditch bid to stir voters, the SPD's Gabriel accused Merkel of caving in to the demands of US President Donald Trump by pledging to raise defence spending to two percent of GDP.

"That's the wrong way," Gabriel told Huffington Post. "Germany is the voice of peace and disarmament and not the European offshoot of Trumpian military armaments policy."

Governing in Merkel's shadow has cost the SPD voter support, and polls give it 21-22 percent compared to 34-36 percent for Merkel's conservative bloc which also includes the Bavarian CSU.

Looking at the surveys, many rank-and-file SPD members wonder whether the traditional working class party needs a stint in opposition to rekindle its fighting spirit.

This would leave the presumed winner Merkel in need of new coalition partners -- possibly the liberal and pro-business Free Democrats, who are hoping for a comeback after crashing out of parliament four years ago.

Another potential partner is the ecologist and left-leaning Greens party, which however starkly differs with the FDP on issues from climate and green energy to migration policy.