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Dollar crunch raises spectre of load-shedding

Independent power producers warn, want \$1.05b to be in operation for March-June

ZYMA ISLAM and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Private power plants that use furnace oil risk facing severe shortage of fuel and this may result in power cuts during the hottest months of this year.

These plants will need \$1.05 billion between March and June to import enough fuel, according to a letter sent by the power producers' association to Bangladesh Bank.

The amount is more than a quarter of the total fuel cost Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) estimates that it will need in that period to ensure adequate power supply.

Since the power generated by these plants is expensive and the foreign exchange reserve has been in decline, the government may prioritise plants that require cheaper fuel like gas.

But the private plants make up as much as 27 percent of the total capacity of the country's grid. The likelihood



of them remaining underutilised raises concerns of major power cuts in summer.

The country's energy security is at peril without Bangladesh Bank's support for import of furnace oil or HFO, lube and spare parts for the plants, said the letter Bangladesh Independent Power Producers' Association sent to the BB on February 20.

"Due to the shortage of US dollars in the market, it is not possible for the member companies to import the required HFO... to meet the demand of electricity... The power producers are unable to import the required fuel and parts," said the letter signed by the association President Faisal Khan.

These power plants need 21.2 lakh tonnes of HFO between March and June to produce electricity at 80 percent of their rated power, said the letter, urging Bangladesh Bank to provide US dollars to local commercial banks so that letters of credit (LCs) can be opened for imports critical for power generation.

Contacted, BB Executive Director Mezbaul Haque said that the central bank will provide support according to whatever decision the government makes. The private power plants have already received over a billion dollars from the BB this year, he told The Daily Star.

However, according to the PDB 2022 report, the government last year spent only about half the budget it allocated for buying HFO and diesel because of shrinking dollar reserves.

Even after the government curtailed purchase of liquid fuel amid a shortage of dollar reserves, the total expenditure on liquid fuel needed for power generation

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Family members place floral wreaths at the grave of a Bangladesh Army officer who was killed during the BDR mutiny at the BDR headquarters in the capital on February 25-26, 2009. Yesterday was the 14th anniversary of the incident. The photo was taken at the Banani Military Graveyard.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Islamic University halls run by BCL diktat

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and

AMANUR AMAN from Kushtia

It's the Chhatra League leaders, not the university or the hall administration, who are running the show at the dorms of Islamic University.

They are the ones who are allowing the freshers in.

The university has seats for only 21 percent of its students at its eight dormitories. Taking an undue advantage of the huge seat crisis, apart from a few exceptions, Bangladesh Chhatra League grants permission to first-year students to stay at "gono rooms". In exchange, BCL men force students to join political rallies and processions, causing disruptions to their studies, said residential students.

"Gono room" is a term used by students for a dormitory room where many students stay together due to accommodation problems.

"Students do not even dare to speak against Chhatra League, let alone waging a movement, for fear of repercussions," said a masters student from Lalor Shah Hall.

Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, a professor of international relations at Dhaka University, said the issues of seat crisis and ruling party-backed student organisation's violence, bullying, sexual harassment and other crimes on campuses are related.

He said students need to depend on Chhatra League leaders for having seats as the hall authorities and teachers do not play their due roles. "They do not get seats based on needs and merit either. As a consequence, students become hostage to the whims of a pro-ruling party student organisation. The leaders recruit them for their organisation."

The issue of allowing students to live in dormitories by pro-ruling party student organisations came to the fore after the recent harassment of a female student at the Islamic University.

Phulpori Khutun, a first-year student, was tortured by some BCL leaders and activists at the Deshratna Sheikh Hasina Hall.

Phulpori on February 14 alleged that BCL university unit Vice President Sanjida Chowdhury, activist Tabassum Islam and several others tortured her on the night of February 12 for staying at the hall without their "permission".

A university official said Phulpori, who hails from Pabna, came to the hall with the help of an acquaintance of her elder sister. When Sanjida came to know about her staying at the hall as a "guest" without their "consent", she became furious.

Contacted, hall Provost Prof Shamsul

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14-party not
functional
now: Menon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Rajshahi

Workers
Party
President
Rashed
Khan Menon
yesterday
said the ruling Awami
League-led 14-party
alliance is "non-functional".

He said his party would join the next general elections only when it would be allowed to participate with its own electoral symbol, "hammer".

Menon was addressing the party's divisional rally at the Madrasa Maidan in Rajshahi.

"It was Awami League's proposal that we [14-party] will participate in the movement, and elections and then form government together. We stayed with the movement and participated in the elections together, but when it

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President blasts
big businesses
for loan default

Graft key obstacle to progress,
he says at JU convocation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



President Abdul Hamid yesterday said common people are not responsible even for one percent of the defaulted bank loans, while big businesspeople and industrialists take out loans with no intention of paying them back.

"Of course, some bankers are also involved in it," he added.

The president was speaking at the sixth convocation of Jahangirnagar University in Savar.

Saying that corruption is one of the biggest obstacles on the path of the country's development, he said everyone should be aware, and teachers should keep themselves free from corruption and nepotism.

Criticising a section of businesspeople, Hamid said that while starting a business,

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WAR IN UKRAINE
Balancing act
may get trickier
for Bangladesh
Say security analysts

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Security analysts fear that the Ukraine-Russia war could intensify in the coming days, pushing the whole world into further trouble, unless there are serious peace initiatives to stop the war that began a year ago.

If the war continues, the world will become more polarised between the Sino-Russian bloc and the US-led bloc, and Bangladesh like many other countries that maintain a neutral stance will find it increasingly difficult to make a balance, they said.

Russia is now controlling a significant part of Eastern Ukraine and annexed it through a referendum.

"So, it is not easily leaving Crimea, which was annexed in 2014, and the newly annexed region," said Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) President Maj Gen (retd) ANM Muniruzzaman.

"During the winter, the fighting took place at a comparatively low level, but as the spring is starting in March and the Western powers have pledged modern tanks to Ukraine, it is likely that the fighting will intensify then," he added.

"Ukraine also wanted fighter aircraft

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Members of the Awami League attack BNP activists and the stage of a BNP programme in front of the latter's district office in Nilphamari town around 11:30am yesterday.

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BNP ROAD MARCH
Over 100 hurt
in clashes with
police, AL men
At least 100 held

STAR REPORT

Over 100 leaders and activists of the BNP were held during the party's nationwide road march programme yesterday.

At least 100 more people, including six policemen, were injured when police and the ruling party men attacked them.

In Natore, six crude bombs exploded near the BNP's party office.

"Jubo League and Chhatra League men hurled the bombs from motorcycles to scare our men," said Zillur Rahman Khan Chowdhury, general secretary of Natore city unit BNP.

Contacted, Farhad Bin Aziz, president of the district unit BCL, refuted the allegation and said the BNP men were behind the blasts.

Fifty-nine leaders and activists of the BNP were held in this connection, said police.

In Jhalakathi, some 60 BNP activists and six policemen were injured in a clash between police and the party men.

The clash broke out when police intercepted the BNP's march on Amtala road in the town.

"Police attacked our peaceful programme without any provocation," said Sahadat Hossain, member secretary of the district unit BNP.

Nasir Uddin Sarkar, officer-in-charge (OC) of Jhalakathi

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