



STARVED OF COAL

Payra power plant may shut for weeks

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Coal shortage has forced officials to shut down a 660 megawatt unit of Payra power plant on May 25, a first in its three years of operation, and if things stay as they are, the other unit of the plant will stop production in about a week.

Payra 1,320MW Thermal Power Plant has been a reliable source of power for the entire Barishal region and parts of Khulna and Dhaka.

Sources at the country's largest coal-fired power plant say they have only around 50,000 tonnes of coal in stock, and each of the two units require around 6,000 tonnes a day.

The second 660MW unit will also stop operation after about a week, they add.

Bangladesh-China Power Company Ltd (BCPCL) operates the power plant while China National Machinery Import and Export Company (CMC), which has 50 percent stake in the plant, pays for the coal. CMC realises the money from Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) within six months of paying for coal shipments.

On April 27, the BCPCL wrote to the ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, the PDB and Bangladesh Bank saying that the CMC imposed a ban on coal supply to Payra power plant. "Till the dues are paid, the coal supply will not resume," read the letter.

The BPDB has yet to pay the dues.

AM Khurshedul Alam, managing director of the BCPCL, told The Daily Star that there was a due of around \$300 million and negotiations about the payment for coal were going on with the PDB and Bangladesh Bank.

"As of last Thursday, we got \$58 million and have the assurance of getting another \$100 million by this month," he said.

Hoping that the CMC will withdraw the ban on coal supplies, he said, "We will open the Letters of Credit. But even if we open those tomorrow, the coal shipment will take at least 25 days to arrive. This means the entire power plant will be out of operation for three to four weeks."

The Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) data shows that the power plant was supplying less than 660MW of electricity at 9:00am on Thursday. Yesterday, the production stayed between 300 and 350MW.

Currently, the country is producing around 12,200MW of electricity against a demand of 13,000MW to 13,500MW.

Meanwhile, Rampal Power Plant, which resumed operation on May 16 after three weeks due to coal shortage, was utilising half of the capacity of its only operational unit.

The country was producing around 2,000MW of electricity from coal-based power plants yesterday against a capacity of 3,440MW.

PDB spokesperson Shameem Hasan told The Daily Star that the authority of Payra was asked to keep the plant operational as long as possible.

"We are waiting for the next coal shipment. If the weather stays favourable, the national demand will not rise. And even if the power plant shuts down, there will not be power cuts.

"We will be able to keep a normal electricity supply from other sources," he added.

The first unit of Payra power plant started the commercial operation on May 15, 2020, while the second one started operation a few months later.



Farmers in Khulna's Dumuria drying their Boro paddy under the sun yesterday after boiling them. The paddy needs at least two days under the sun to be ready for millers to turn them into rice.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

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ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Form independent body to punish culprits

Urge families of victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rights activists and the family members of enforced disappearance victims called upon the government to set up an independent commission to investigate the cases of enforced disappearances and punish the responsible agencies and individuals.

The family members of the victims stood in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

The gathering was organised by Maayer Daak, a platform for the families of the victims, in commemoration of the International Week of the Disappeared.

Rights activists highlighted that the number of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings has significantly decreased after the United States sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and seven of its officials.

They also believe that the recent US Visa Policy would be similarly effective, particularly in the context of the upcoming national election, as many cases of enforced



disappearances and extrajudicial killings have occurred before previous elections in 2014 and 2018.

Nur Khan, a prominent rights activist, also the executive director of the Ain O Salish Kendra, said that there are indications of change following the US actions.

He demanded that the government establish an independent commission to identify the responsible agencies,

officers and individuals involved in enforced disappearances and ensure that they are held accountable for their actions.

"The highest authorities of the state are saying that there are not many enforced disappearances and that many of the victims went into hiding. Such statement from the people who run the state gives impunity to those responsible for

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Saturn's iconic rings are disappearing

CNN ONLINE

Saturn's iconic icy rings may not be around for future skygazers to glimpse at through their telescopes, according to new research.

A new analysis of data captured by NASA's Cassini mission, which orbited the gas giant planet between 2004 and 2017, has revealed new insights into how long the rings have been around and when they may vanish from sight. The findings have been shared in three studies published in May.

Our solar system and its planets formed about 4.6 billion years ago, and scientists have long debated the age and origin of Saturn's rings. Some astronomers have argued that the bright, icy rings must be younger than expected because they haven't been eroded and darkened by interactions with meteoroids across billions of years.

The Cassini data has led to a new finding, published May 15 in the journal Icarus, that supports this theory of the rings appearing long after Saturn's initial formation. Additional studies published on May 12 in Science Advances and May 15 in Icarus, respectively, arrived at similar conclusions.

Rab recovers 14kg of ivory in Ctg

One suspect held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Rab has arrested a suspected wildlife smuggler with 14kgs of ivory and a buckskin worth Tk 1.37 crore from his flat in Chattogram's Panchlaish.

The arrestee is Abdul Malek, 68, of Sylhet's Kamalganj. However, he has been living in Rangamati's Bagaichari area for the last 40 years and owns around 12 elephants legally.

Rab-7's Chandgaon Camp Commander Major Mehedi Hasan told The Daily Star that a team of Rab, on information, raided the house of Malek in the Panchlaish area on Friday around 11:30pm.

"We had information about Malek's involvement in smuggling ivory and skins of deer," Major Mehedi Hasan said.

"After hours of searching, Rab found the ivory weighing 14kg and a buckskin inside a plastic

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BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain addressing a mammoth rally organised by the party's south and north city units at the BNP Nayapaltan office to press home its 10-point demand yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Retired bank staffer found dead at home

His wife, daughters sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police yesterday recovered the body of a retired bank employee from his home in Kulaura upazila.

Sheikh Rafiqul Islam Siddiqui, 65, was a resident of Krishnapur village under the upazila's Bhatara union.

His wife Mishfa Akhter Siddiqua, daughters Sheikh Sharmin Akhter Siddiqua and Sheikh Tazreen Akhter Siddiqua, and son-in-law Mehedi Hasan (Tazreen's husband) were arrested in this connection.

They were all sent to jail after they were produced before a Moulvibazar court in the afternoon.

The victim's elder brother Sheikh Sirajul Islam Siddiqui sued the four in a murder case along with two others.

Sirajul claimed that Rafiqul was killed by the accused over family disputes centring his pension money.

"After his retirement two years ago, Rafiqul received a pension of Tk 52 lakh. His wife and two daughters wanted to have this money for themselves."

On Friday night, a family arbitration was held that failed to reach an agreement.

Later, Sirajul received the news of his brother's death around 1:30am and found Rafiqul's body on the balcony.

Kulaura Police Station Inspector (Investigation) Ratan Debnath said the police found injuries marks on the back of the victim's head and nail marks on his neck.

"The body has been sent to the Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital mortuary for post-mortem. The cause of death will confirmed be after receiving the post-mortem report."