

ELECTRICITY CRISIS Situation to improve in 10- 15 days: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said more electricity will be added to the national grid within the next 10-15 days, ending the ongoing power crisis. “We have been compelled to go for load shedding I can realise the sufferings of the people. We’ve been trying our best. Around 500 megawatts electricity will be added to the national grid within the next one or two days. More power will be added within 10-15 days. Then there’ll be no sufferings,” she said.

The PM was addressing a discussion arranged by the Awami League at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the city, marking the historic Six-point Day.

Hasina said unfortunately, this time the people are enduring abnormally high temperature. “We can’t think the temperature would go up to 41 degrees.”

She said the lack of rain aggravated the people’s suffering. “We’re meetings time and again to find the ways out and trying to ease this suffering.”

Turkish pro- opposition media hit with fines

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey’s journalists’ association yesterday criticised fines imposed by the country’s media regulator on four pro-opposition television channels during the election campaign, saying they “penalise the public’s right to information”.

The Supreme Council of Radio and Television (RTUK) targeted Tele 1, Fox TV, Halk TV and Flash Haber for comments made by some of their guests ahead of the elections.

The journalists’ association president Nazmi Bilgin said it was an “unacceptable violation of the public’s right to receive information and make electoral choices”.

“(The) merciless punishment of the right to free expression” had “transformed the regulator into an instrument of the government to silence the opposition and those who criticise it”, he said in a statement.

The level of the fines, which was not specified, will be determined by the channels’ advertising revenues.

Erol Onderoglu, Turkey representative for Reporters Without Borders (RSF), told AFP the outlets “regularly receive fines that are disproportionate to their revenues”.



Marking the historic Six-point Day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday pays homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing a wreath at his portrait in front of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi.

PHOTO: PID

SUDAN CONFLICT

Military factions battle over fuel depots, weapons

REUTERS, Khartoum

Sudan’s army has been battling to defend a military industrial complex believed to contain large stocks of weapons and ammunition in southern Khartoum, close to fuel and gas depots that are at risk of exploding, residents said yesterday.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), in the eighth week of a power struggle with the army, had attacked the area containing the Yarmouk complex late on Tuesday before retreating after heavy fighting, witnesses said. Clashes could still be heard yesterday morning.

The RSF quickly seized swathes of the capital after war erupted in Khartoum on April 15. Army air strikes and artillery fire have shown little sign of dislodging them, but as the fighting drags on the RSF may face a challenge restocking with ammunition and fuel.

Fighting across the three cities that make up Sudan’s greater capital region - Khartoum, Bahri and Omdurman - has picked up since a 12 day ceasefire formally expired on June 3 after repeated violations.

“Since yesterday [Tuesday] there has been a violent battle with the use of planes and artillery and clashes on the ground and columns of smoke rising,” Nader Youssef, a resident living near Yarmouk, told Reuters by phone.

Due to the proximity of fuel and gas depots, “any explosion could destroy

Over 1,428,000 people have been driven from their homes within Sudan and a further 476,800 have fled into neighbouring countries: IOM

residents and the whole area”, he said.

The fighting derailed the launch a transition towards civilian rule four years after a popular uprising ousted strongman president Omar al-Bashir. The army and RSF, which together staged a coup in 2021, fell out over the chain of command and military restructuring plans under the transition.

The conflict has wreaked havoc on the capital, triggered new outbursts of deadly

violence in the long volatile western region of Darfur, and displaced more than 1.9 million people.

Most health services have collapsed, power and water is often cut, and looting has been spreading.

In Bahri, north of the Blue Nile from Khartoum, local activists said that more than 50 days of water cuts had driven many people from their homes and that they were caught between having nothing to drink and being trapped in the crossfire as they searched for water.

More than 1,428,000 people have been driven from their homes within Sudan and a further 476,800 have fled into neighbouring countries, most of which are already struggling with poverty and internal conflict, according to estimates published on Tuesday by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Sudan’s health ministry has recorded at least 780 civilian deaths as a direct result of the fighting. Hundreds more have been killed in the city of El Geneina in West Darfur. Medical officials say many bodies remain uncollected or unrecorded.

Secondary schools, colleges closed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All secondary schools and colleges across the country will remain closed today because of the ongoing heatwave.

Education ministry’s Public Relations Officer Abul Khair confirmed the matter to The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education announced the closure of all government primary schools till today for the same reason.

Most parts of the country have been facing scorching heat since the last week of May.

The prevailing mild, moderate, and severe heatwave may continue for five to six more days, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department said on Tuesday.

2 bodies recovered from car in Tejgaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the bodies of a man and a woman from inside a car in the capital’s Tejgaon Elenbari area yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Delwar Hossain Molla, 53, and Mousumi Akter Rani, 42.

On information, police recovered the bodies from inside the car around 7:30am.

The car was parked inside a garage at a government staff quarters, said Shah Alam, inspector (investigation) of Tejgaon Police Station.

The inspector said they came to know that Delwar was an office assistant of a government office, but did not get details about the female.

Both bodies were sent to the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Man killed during arbitration meeting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A man was stabbed to death during an arbitration meeting called to settle a domestic dispute between a married couple in Majhipara village of Dinajpur Sadar upazila Tuesday night.

Police subsequently arrested Nur Mohammad, 60, who lived with his wife at his in-laws’ house and they often got into domestic quarrels.

Joynal Abedin, his father-in-law called the arbitrations on Tuesday night to settle the matter.

The deceased Abdus Sobhan, a local resident, was stabbed when he went to call Nur for the meeting, said police.

Locals rushed him to M Abdur Rahim Medical College, where he died around 9:30pm Tuesday night.

His body was sent for autopsy, said Tanvirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Sadar Police Station.

The suspected killer was arrested and a case was filed against him, he added.

External forces

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Six-point Day.

She also said it was the AL that protected democracy and voting rights, and ensured the continuation of democracy in the country.

Hasina said she has already told the authorities concerned to let the BNP wage movement.

She, however, asked the authorities to stay alert always “so that the BNP can’t repeat the arson violence like they did in 2013, 2014 and 2015.”

“We have to always remember that this country is ours. We will not allow anyone to play with the fate of the people. No matter how much local and international pressure comes, Bangladeshes don’t bow to it,” said Hasina.

She, however, asked the authorities to stay alert always “so that the BNP can’t repeat the arson violence like they did in 2013, 2014 and 2015.”

She said her party will keep protecting people’s voting rights. “It is we who brought democracy, waging movements and struggles in this country. Since there is the continuation of democracy, Bangladesh has today witnessed progress and socio-economic uplift.”

AL Advisory Council member Amir Hossain Amu, its presidium members engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Matia Chowdhury, Shajahan Khan and Simeen Hussain Rimi, among others, spoke at the discussion.

On June 7, 1966, Bangladesh’s founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched a massive movement against the misuse of the Pakistanis on the basis of the Six-point demand, the Magna Carta of the Bangladeshes, demanding autonomy for the then East Pakistan.

Dialogue not on AL’s mind at the moment

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During her address at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday, Hasina did not say anything about dialogue but she did say, “Let them [the BNP] do whatever movement they want to do. We’ll not say anything.”

When asked about the party’s stance on dialogue, a central leader of the AL cited the remarks of Hasina and said the party president made it crystal clear.

But before Hasina spoke, senior AL leaders had made confusing statements.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said his party has made no decision to hold talks with political parties ahead of the next national election.

But, he said, “In our country, we will discuss our own problems. We will solve it ourselves if necessary. There is no such political crisis in the country that

requires the mediation or intervention of the United Nations.”

Solution to any crises is in the constitution, he said after placing a wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu.

Responding to a question about Amu’s statement, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan stressed the need for dialogue for solving any problems. There is no alternative to having talks, he said.

AL Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud at a programme around noon said what Amu had said was his personal opinion and that it was not the position of the government or the AL or the 14-party alliance.

“There was no discussion about this in our party or in the government. It was not even discussed in the 14-party

alliance,” said Hasan, also information and broadcasting minister.

AL insiders said the party might rethink its stance if the BNP came up with a proposal for dialogue accepting that Hasina would lead the election-time government.

The BNP, however, said it is not paying any heed to the statements about dialogue as it wants to realise its demands through a movement.

BNP standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday said his party was yet to get any formal proposal from the AL about the election-time government.

“It is not important to me who is saying what. If anyone gives us any written proposal, we will consider responding,” he said at a programme.

Depreciation, tax pose medium-term risk

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percent in the year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank. A year earlier, the depreciation was about 5 percent.

“Overall, the exchange rate depreciation may raise fiscal burden to some extent in the medium term,” reads the MTMPS.

Although it states that the debt level will remain within the sustainable ceiling, economists beg to differ.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said, “The debt service to GDP ratio is not of much use as the government does not have the GDP in its hand to repay the debt with....”

Here, the government is lagging.

At 7.77 percent at the end of fiscal 2022-23, Bangladesh’s tax-to-GDP ratio is the lowest amongst its peer countries, according to the finance division study.

“After a 23.8 growth in fiscal 2020-21, revenue grew at a modest rate of 1.8 percent last year. To meet the development goals set for 2031 and 2041, revenue collection needs to be increased significantly,” the MTMPS says.

But the prospective depreciation will have a direct impact on revenue by way of import-related taxes, it adds.

With the dollar becoming more expensive vis-à-vis the taka, imports will come down, and so will the import-related tax receipts.

The depreciation will also increase the government’s expenditure.

On the spending side, the main items affected are: the fertiliser subsidy bill; payments to the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation for oil imports; the externally financed portion of the annual development programme; and interest payments on external debt.

“The upward movement of the foreign exchange rate may increase the subsidy expenditure of the government to a large extent.”

An assessment by the Bangladesh Power Development Board found that the depreciation of the taka will escalate the power subsidy by Tk 473.6 crore in fiscal 2023-24.

It may also result in a significant hike in project costs run by the government, it said.

“Many of the government projects, especially the mega projects, are heavily dependent on imported items. Thus, depreciation of exchange rate may result in cost escalation of the projects creating additional fiscal burden.”

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank’s Dhaka office, said there are further risks from depreciation.

“The analysis of risk arising from exchange rate fluctuations presented in the macroeconomic statement is detailed but incomplete from an

accounting perspective.”

The focus is entirely on the impact on government expenditure and external debt.

“What it overlooks completely is the direct and indirect impact of the same depreciation on government revenues and external financing.”

Revenues from all taxes based on the taka value of imports rise as a result of exchange rate depreciation.

There are also indirect effects with an increase in prices of domestically produced substitutes as import prices increase. The taka value of external credit disbursements will also increase.

Hussain said, “Most importantly, the analysis does not go deeper into downside fiscal risks if authorities do not allow the exchange rate to depreciate. The resulting dollar shortage constrains the entire economy affecting economic activities and prices, which, in turn, disrupt efficient conduct of fiscal management, among others.”

Mansur, also a former economist of the International Monetary Fund, said that exchange rate stability is not possible without removing the interest rate cap.

“Interest rate cap is one of the reasons for the macroeconomic instability,” he said, while urging the government to be more careful when taking on foreign debt.

Mayor Taposh

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“In the column, the name of Dhaka South City Corporation was distorted to make Dhoka South Town Corporation ... the person who wrote this column distorted their own opinion and, in inverted commas, passed them off as comments of the honourable mayor.”

Such comments are defamation under the existing law – the Penal Code, he said.

“After reading the report, the DSCC mayor has directed me to take legal steps and accordingly I sent a legal notice as a primary step. In the notice we have sought two things – the report must be removed from online version in 24 hours, they [notice receivers] must apologise unconditionally in the print version and will have to pay Tk 100 crore as compensation,” he added.

The lawyer said he will take the next course of action on the advice from the DSCC mayor after seeing what steps the notice receivers take.

Our reply to legal notice

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only two days to respond. But before we could come up with our response within the stipulated time, Lex Counsel held a press briefing on June 7, 2023. There, the law firm stated that Mayor Taposh has served a legal notice on The Daily Star and sought Tk 100 crore for defamation. It went on to term the satire article a “report” or a “column”, which is factually incorrect.

In response to the legal notice and the subsequent briefing, we humbly reiterate that it was neither a “report” nor a “column,” but a satirical piece, which is mostly presented in a parody format in mainstream journalism. Satire relies heavily on irony and deadpan humour. Globally, such satirical articles are written on important and powerful persons and/or institutions. Political leaders, Nobel laureates, famous writers and prominent activists are subjects of satire and irony. It is the standard literary and journalistic practice.

We, however, are shocked to

Mejbahur Rahman sent the legal notice on behalf of Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh on June 5, asking Mahfuz Anam, the editor and publisher, Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque, and the writer, Naziba Basher, to pay the money within seven days of the date of receipt of the legal notice served “for creating and publishing defamatory imputation in your national Daily, in online publication and on social media and network with criminal intention to insult, humiliate and persecute our client, thus intentionally harming hard earned reputation of my client, his family and his institution”.

The notice said the article went against the principles of journalism as present in the existing laws.

Appropriate legal action would be taken against the notice receivers if required steps are not taken within the time, the lawyer said during the briefing yesterday.

find ourselves so fundamentally misunderstood. In no way was our article meant to defame, humiliate or hurt anybody; it was simply a satire published in Satireday, our weekly page designated for satire. The topic was chosen only because it was one of the public interest issues and many reports, articles and editorials had already been written on it.

It is a long-standing journalistic practice, and it’s known all over the world that important leaders and top-level decision makers are subjects of satire. This piece was written to draw more attention to a matter of public concern and assist the authorities to reconsider and re-evaluate their decision, and not, we repeat, not to hurt anyone in any way. It was furthest from our intention. Still, we are sorry to know that our satire piece has ended up upsetting the notice giver.

As a gesture of goodwill, we have already unpublished the link upon knowledge of the unintended hurt as communicated in the legal notice.

-Editor