

New govt faces 'a daunting set of challenges'

Int'l Crisis Group urges swift economic, governance reforms

UNB, Dhaka

The International Crisis Group yesterday said Bangladesh's newly elected government faces a "daunting set of challenges", but how it handles these competing pressures will shape the country's trajectory in the years ahead.

"If it can revive the economy, the government will create space to pursue the rest of its ambitious agenda, including improving public services and strengthening the rule of law."

It added that if the government fails to create the jobs needed to meet the aspirations of young Bangladeshis or struggles to ensure clean governance, the country could face another bout of instability and political upheaval.

The organisation said the BNP should take advantage of the "post-election honeymoon period" to move quickly on economic, governance and security reforms.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4



Amnaa al-Abed mourns over the bodies of her sons, Salah and Abdullah, killed in a reported Israeli airstrike the previous night during their funeral at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City yesterday. Gaza's civil defence agency said an Israeli airstrike targeted a group of civilians in a northern part of the Palestinian territory late on April 22, killing five people, including three children.

PHOTO: AFP

FROM PRESS GALLERY



Begin Dhaka load shedding from JS Bhaban

Shafiqur suggests in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader Shafiqur Rahman yesterday proposed that the government's planned load-shedding in Dhaka should begin at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

He made the suggestion while taking the floor in the House around 8:00 pm, hours after State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Aninda Islam Anit gave a statement on the power crisis.

"It is not desirable that those living in urban areas remain comfortable while rural people suffer. The spirit of the July uprising calls for a discrimination-free Bangladesh. There should be no disparity between urban and rural areas," Aninda said while speaking under Rule 300 of the Rules of Procedure.

Following discussions with the opposition leader, the government decided to conduct an initial trial of 110 MW of load-shedding in Dhaka, he announced.

Referring to Aninda's statement, Shafiqur added, "I would request that this begin from parliament itself... If other parts of Dhaka face one hour of load shedding, then there should be one here too. Let it begin here, so people understand that we are trying to build a Bangladesh based on equality."

Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmed responded, "Parliament must continue functioning. The House cannot be shut down."

Shafiqur then clarified, "I meant the parliament, not the parliamentary session. There are many working hours outside the session. That is what I meant."

Govt to publish white paper on education sector

Irregularities, corruption during AL era to be probed, says Milon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon yesterday told parliament that a white paper will be published on irregularities and corruption in the education sector during the Awami League era.

His announcement came in response to a query by Pabna-5 MP Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas during the question-and-answer session chaired by Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad.

Milon said the government has placed policy emphasis on investigating irregularities and corruption in the education sector from the 2008-09 fiscal year to 2024-25, adding that the education ministry has already instructed relevant authorities to thoroughly examine possible financial and administrative lapses, along with managerial weaknesses, and prepare a consolidated report.

The minister added that once the investigation and verification process is complete, the government will take steps to draft and publish the white paper in phases.

However, given the broad scope of the inquiry, he noted that it is not possible at this stage to set a specific timeline.

OVER 92,000 TEACHER POSTS VACANT

The education minister also said the country's secondary institutions are suffering from around 92,081 vacant teacher posts across government and non-government institutions in general, madrasa, and technical streams.

Replying to queries from MPs at the question-and-answer session, he added that 77,227 posts remain vacant in private (MPO-listed) educational institutions.

Through the e-requisition process, the ministry has compiled a nationwide list of vacancies, and the Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA) will soon issue a recruitment circular to gradually fill the posts, he said.

In another response, Milon said that technical education institutions have 15,844 sanctioned teacher posts, of which 7,074 are occupied and 8,770 are vacant.

The minister added that recruitment is already underway for 1,552 positions, while the Directorate of Technical Education has sent a requisition to the Public Service Commission to fill another 1,579 posts.

He said three government Alia madrasas currently have 114 vacant teaching posts, while non-government madrasas face 1,354 vacancies for superintendents and 1,774 for assistant superintendents.

Milon further informed parliament that government secondary schools have 2,842 vacant posts, assuring that steps are being taken to fill them through the PSC in government schools and through NTRCA in non-government institutions.

Power cuts worsen

FROM PAGE 1

The decision was made on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's instruction upon consultation with opposition leader Shafiqur Rahman.

WORSENING POWER CUTS

Data showed the power situation has been deteriorating.

Yesterday, as of 8:00pm, the demand stood at 16,237MW while the production was 13,988MW, leaving a 2,249MW shortfall, PDB data showed. Outages continued throughout the day, with the highest load shedding recorded at 2,483MW around 7:00pm.

On Tuesday, daytime peak demand reached 15,500MW at noon, against a generation of 14,069MW, leaving a shortfall of 1,462MW, according to the PDB. The shortage exceeded 1,000MW almost every hour that day, peaking at 1,840MW at 9:00pm.

PDB mentioned that 72 out of 143 power plants had shortages of gas, coal, or furnace oil.

To manage the shortfall, the PDB had to increase power generation from costly furnace oil-based plants, said officials.

Furnace oil-based plants yesterday produced 3,000MW. They had been producing around 1,000MW for most of the time this month.

The situation worsened after one of the two units of India's Adani power plant, with a combined capacity of 1,435MW, went offline due to technical issues. Besides, imports from India, except Adani, also decreased to 800MW from 1,100MW yesterday.

Three of Bangladesh's eight coal-fired plants are also running below capacity: SS Power (1,224MW) in Chattogram and RNPL

(1,320MW) in Patuakhali due to coal shortages and Barapukuria due to mechanical issues.

Power Division Joint Secretary Umme Rehana said generation is expected to improve once these plants resume full operation. The Adani unit is expected to resume operation by April 26, SS Power by April 28, and RNPL by early May, according to her.

"We expect an increase of around 1,982MW in generation from coal-fired plants from the first week of May," she said at a briefing at the Secretariat.

Even then, total generation may reach 17,000MW against a projected summer demand of 18,500MW.

Meanwhile, the government plans to reopen the Ashuganj fertiliser factory on May 1, diverting around 50 million cubic feet per day (Mcf/d) of gas from power plants.

Currently, gas-fired plants receive about 900Mcf/d, producing up to 5,400MW.

A drop to 850Mcf/d could reduce output by 400MW, according to officials.

Although installed capacity in gas-fired plants is 12,154MW, nearly 60 percent may remain unused this summer due to shortfalls in domestic production and reduced imports.

"We need around 2,000Mcf/d of gas to run the plants at capacity, but the Energy Division cannot supply that volume as gas also goes to industries and fertiliser production," Rehana said.

Acknowledging public suffering, State Minister Aninda said the crisis is not a short-term issue but the result of accumulated problems.

"Despite higher installed capacity on paper, there

remains a mismatch with actual generation," he told parliament.

He said gas demand is 3,800Mcf/d, while domestic production is 1,616Mcf/d and 950Mcf/d comes from imports, leaving a shortfall of 1,164Mcf/d.

"Even if we had the financial capacity, it is not possible to increase imports immediately due to infrastructure limitations," he said, adding that expanding energy infrastructure is among the government's priorities under its 180-day action plan.

VILLAGES BEAR THE BRUNT

Across districts, prolonged outages continued to disrupt daily life, farming, and healthcare.

In Noakhali, consumers reported up to seven to eight hours of load shedding daily.

"In 24 hours, we don't get more than five to six hours of electricity. Once it comes, it stays only 30-40 minutes," said Poli Akhter, a homemaker from Chatkhil. "We can't store food properly, and even IPS batteries don't get charged."

Farmers and students are among the worst affected.

"SSC examinees are suffering the most," said Abu Sayeed Ratan, a schoolteacher from Mymensingh.

In Khulna's Batiaghata, shrimp farmer Prosad Roy said outages of four to seven hours daily are affecting production. "Even an hour's outage can kill shrimp. Running generators is too costly," he said.

Similar accounts came from Rajshahi and Cumilla, where residents reported sleepless nights, disrupted studies, and harvesting problems.

[Our correspondents in respective districts contributed to the report]

Iran tightens its grip on Hormuz as talks uncertain

FROM PAGE 1

international waters to enforce a blockade of its own, said it had boarded another tanker, the Majestic, in the Indian Ocean yesterday, an apparent reference to a supertanker last reported off the coast of Sri Lanka carrying 2 million barrels of crude.

Amid diplomatic efforts to restart the failed talks, a senior Iranian source told Reuters that Iran could consider attending a meeting in Pakistan, but only if the US blockade is lifted and seized Iranian ships are released.

In an early morning social media post, U.S. President Donald Trump said it was Washington that was in "total control" of the strait, which he described as "Scaled up Tight," until such time as Iran is able to make a DEAL!!!

The US blockade has not, however, halted Iran's own use of the strait, according to data analytics firm Vortexa, which said about 10.7 million barrels of Iranian crude exports had crossed it and left the area blockaded by the US Navy between April 13 and 21.

"A complete ceasefire only has meaning if it is not violated through a naval blockade," said Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led Tehran's delegation at the first round of talks. "Reopening the Strait of Hormuz is not possible amid a blatant violation of the ceasefire."

Ghalibaf's deputy, Hamidrez Hajibabei said Iran has received its first revenue from tolls it is imposing on ships seeking to cross Hormuz, a route that in peacetime accounts for a fifth of the world's oil and gas flows, and other vital commodities. However, he did not disclose any information regarding the nationality of the ship or ships.

Analysts said Tehran, in particular its hardline

leaders associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), believes that Iran's blockade gives it sufficient economic leverage to force Washington to back down on its main demands in eventual peace talks.

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Trump also said he had ordered the Navy to "shoot and kill" Iranian boats laying mines in the strait, and step up demining activity, though he did not mention other means Iran has used to block shipping, such as speedboats, missiles and drones.

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejdi said the merchant vessels Iran had seized had "faced the law", while Iranian speedboats and marine drones were sheltering in sea caves off an island, keeping the US Navy from approaching.

Trump cancelled threats to restart attacks on Iran in the ceasefire's final hours on Tuesday, but refuses to lift the naval blockade. There has been no formal extension of the ceasefire, and no plans have been announced for further talks.

Pakistan, which hosted talks this month and had been preparing for a second

Bus fare hiked by about 5%

FROM PAGE 1

involved, he said.

"Since the current government has been in office for only two months, we have accepted its decision out of respect. We have officially submitted a note of dissent over our concerns."

On the other hand, the increase applies only to diesel-run buses, while fares for CNG-run vehicles remain unchanged.

The fares would be adjusted automatically in line with changes in fuel prices.

Khokon also warned of strict monitoring to prevent overcharging.

Meanwhile, fares were

Minimum fare unchanged at Tk 10

Fares rise in Dhaka, Chattogram cities 4.6%

Inter-district fares rise by 5.1%

Operators hiked fare before announcement

already increased before the official announcement.

On routes such as Gulistan to Farmgate, where the fixed fare is Tk 13, passengers were charged between Tk 15 and Tk 20.

Similar irregularities were reported on long-distance routes, with operators citing fuel shortages and rising costs.

Fuel shortages and long queues at filling stations have reduced trips while increasing operational costs, prompting fare hikes, said Enamul Haque Liton, a counter master at a Fulbaria bus terminal operator.

Meanwhile, Mozammel Haque Chowdhury, Secretary General of the Bangladesh Passenger Welfare Association, urged stricter enforcement to ensure discipline on roads, prevent accidents and stop overcharging.

Govt to form a cell

FROM PAGE 12

implementation, including those dealing with information technology, law enforcement, and education.

The initiative comes at a time when the government has identified a rise in online harassment, particularly targeting women and young people.

Speaking to this correspondent, an adviser to the prime minister said cyberbullying has become a serious social issue, with many women facing abuse, threats, and harassment on social media platforms.

"This is not only a digital problem; it is a social problem. It affects people's mental health and their ability to participate freely in public life," he said, adding that while existing government units are already working on cybercrime issues, a more coordinated and centralised approach is needed.

Another PM adviser with the rank of state minister said cyberbullying has become a serious concern in the current context, with ministers, their family members, and women leaders increasingly targeted by coordinated smear campaigns, which need to be put a stop to.

PMO insiders said the planned system will place

special focus on crimes against women and children, online stalking, identity misuse, and abusive content on social media.

There are also plans to engage with major social media companies to improve moderation in the Bangla language, allowing harmful content to be identified and removed faster.

Alongside enforcement, the initiative also includes an awareness and education component. Schools and universities are expected to introduce practical digital safety training, especially during student orientation programmes.

Teachers may be trained to act as "safety focal points", providing guidance to students on how to deal with online risks. Annual awareness campaigns are also being considered to help young users navigate digital spaces responsibly, PMO sources said.

However, the complaint-receiving mechanism of the cell is yet to be finalised. Sources said the proposed cyber cell will operate as a central coordination hub, receiving complaints through a hotline and online portal and directing them to relevant agencies for immediate action.

Once a complaint is filed, trained responders will

verify the case, classify the type of abuse, and forward it to specialised units, including law enforcement, digital forensics teams, and regulatory bodies.

For urgent cases involving threats, harassment, or the spread of private images, authorities will prioritise rapid response, including content removal requests and victim protection measures.

The cell is also expected to maintain direct communication channels with major social media platforms to flag harmful content in both English and Bangla and seek quicker takedowns.

Officials said a tracking system will allow complainants to monitor the progress of their cases, aiming to improve transparency and trust in the system.

In cases involving coordinated smear campaigns or repeated harassment, the cell may initiate deeper investigations by linking multiple complaints and identifying organised networks.

The proposed initiative is in line with the BNP's election manifesto, which promised the establishment of a National Cyber Security Centre to coordinate efforts across government and private sectors.