Businesses see energy crisis as main hurdle

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Twelve ministers and 15 business leaders from different sectors spoke at the meeting.

The prime minister said the government has identified 10 promising sectors, including garments, pharmaceuticals, electrical and electronic products, motor parts, man-made fibre garments, ceramics and tableware, and leather and leather goods, to help achieve the $100 billion export target by 2030.

He said the country's economic challenges could be overcome through close cooperation between the government and the business community.

Many issues raised by business leaders during earlier consultations have already been resolved, while the concerns highlighted yesterday will also be addressed, he added.

"We all acknowledge there are many problems. The government has at least demonstrated that it is trying. The government is not yet six months old, but we have already held several meetings with the business community. We are addressing sector-specific challenges one by one."

The prime minister said another meeting with business leaders would be held within the next two to three months.

"The more we sit together, the better we will understand your problems and the easier it will be to resolve them."

He said sustained engagement between the government and the private sector could bring meaningful improvements to the economy within four to five years.

Officials informed the meeting that decisions have already been taken on 21 of the 28 issues discussed during the previous consultation, while work on the remaining seven is underway, adds UNB.

THE DECISIONS

The decisions included exploring alternatives to the time-consuming Letter of Credit (LC) system for business transactions and reducing the import duty on solar panels to 2 percent from nearly 35 percent. The 15 percent VAT on solar panel imports, however, will remain unchanged.

The government has also decided to waive all duties on imports of raw materials for sodium-ion and lithium-ion batteries, except customs duties of 1 percent and 15 percent, according to a keynote presentation by the Prime Minister's Office.

Other decisions include involving private sector representatives in National Board of Revenue policy formulation, simplifying approval of bond licences, expanding bond facilities for all export-oriented industries, extending the tenure of bond licences to five years, and allowing companies to continue using bond facilities during audits.

At the request of business leaders, the government also decided to reduce the gap between the assessment value and customs value of imported goods. The government will also assist businesses in establishing a light engineering hub in Bogura.

Two business leaders who attended the meeting told The Daily Star that the government has already acquired 50 bighas of land near the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) Industrial Park in Gajaria upazila of Munshiganj to set up a steam generator for the park.

They also urged the government to allow industrial units to buy CNG from filling stations at night, when vehicle demand is lower.

According to them, filling station operators are reluctant to sell CNG to industries during the day because of high demand from vehicles.

Garment sector leaders recently made the same request, citing an acute gas shortage that is disrupting industrial production.

The meeting also discussed Bangladesh's challenges in graduating from the group of least developed countries (LDCs) and issues related to the Third Terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Famed climber Purja, 9 more die

FROM PAGE 12

internationally after the Netflix documentary chronicling his journey "14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible" was released two years later.

Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah offered his condolences over the "tragic" deaths of Purja and the other climbers, which he said "has shocked us".

Police in the mountainous northern Gilgit-Baltistan region said in a statement that high-altitude porters and rescue teams were carrying out a second day of the operation yesterday after the search was paused due to difficult weather conditions a day earlier.

Rescuers and military helicopters had been scouring the area, and teams stayed at the base camp overnight, according to the regional government.

The team was last in contact on Thursday morning, the official statement said, with reports emerging that evening of the powerful avalanche.

"Data from their tracking devices indicates that they were thrown hundreds of metres down the mountainside," Naila Kiani, from Pakistan's Alpine Club, told Le Monde newspaper.

Purja had written on X this week that he was close to becoming the first person to climb all 14 "super peaks" twice without oxygen.

"Broad Peak, I ask for nothing but safe passage up and back down," he wrote.

He had climbed all 14 "eight-thousanders" (peaks above 8,000 metres) in six months and six days between April and October 2019 -- then a record.

Broad Peak is the world's 12th highest mountain, located in the Karakoram range in northern Pakistan, and is regarded as one of the toughest and most technical climbs of all the 8,000-metre-plus ascents.

It was first summited in 1957 by an Austrian team.

Dhaka seeks info on Bangladeshi POWs

FROM PAGE 12

embassy official in Russia said, "The Bangladesh mission in Poland, which handles matters relating to Ukraine, will pursue the issue, although identifying the three men and obtaining details may take time.

"Any effort to repatriate them could be complicated, as prisoners of war are generally returned through negotiations or exchanges between the countries involved in the conflict."

He added, "Russia will have to request their return, and Ukraine will have to agree.... Repatriation will be possible only if both sides reach an understanding."

Whether Ukraine would agree depends on negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv, the official said.

Meanwhile, the Russian Embassy in Dhaka had not responded to The Daily Star's email seeking comment on the three Bangladeshis by the time this report was filed.

The three men are Rimel Mia, 27, from Sundarganj in Gaibandha; Sarwar Sumon, 40, from Trishal in Mymensingh; and Kamrul Hasan, 38, from Nabinagar in Brahmanbaria. They had all travelled to Russia for civilian employment before joining, or allegedly being drawn into, the Russian military.

In exclusive interviews with The Daily Star, Rimel and Sarwar said they joined the military after losing stable employment and coming under financial pressure, while Kamrul alleged that a broker, promising to take him to Italy, instead made him sign documents linked to the Russian armed forces.

The contracts were written in Russian, a language they said they did not understand.

Rimel was captured by Ukrainian forces on December 8, 2025, after spending around a month at a frontline position.

Sarwar and Kamrul surrendered on May 13, 2026, after spending around five days at a forested position where, they said, they had been deployed ahead of other foreign recruits.

None of the men said they had fired their weapons. Their families received little or no information about them for months.

Rimel's parents learnt that he was alive after seeing The Daily Star's interview with him shared on Facebook. Sarwar's relatives had feared he had been killed, while Kamrul's wife said she had received no direct news from him for more than two months.

The families have urged the government to establish official contact with the Ukrainian authorities and take steps to secure the men's safe return.

"We are poor and uneducated. We do not know whom to approach or what to do," Rimel's father, Md Syed Ali, told this newspaper. "The government knows what can be done."

Tarique to pick BNP presidential candidate

FROM PAGE 1

the country's overall political situation, public administration, the government's development activities and the proposed local government elections.

Standing Committee member and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters that the Election Commission has already begun preparations for the presidential election, which must be held within 90 days of a vacancy under the constitution.

Asked about the BNP's nominee, he said, "Once the election schedule is announced, party Chairman Tarique Rahman will decide who will be the party's candidate."

Party sources said Fakhrul raised the issue during the meeting and sought the views of senior leaders. Recalling that Khaleda Zia had previously been entrusted with making such decisions as party chief, the leaders unanimously requested Tarique, as the current chairman, to make the final decision on the nominee.

The candidate nominated by the parliamentary majority is typically elected. With the BNP holding a majority in parliament, its nominee is almost certain to become the next president.

Party insiders said no Standing Committee member proposed any name from within or outside the party. The leadership remained cautious because of its previous experiences with two former presidents.

The meeting also reviewed the timing of local government elections and assessed whether the prevailing political, administrative and security conditions were suitable for holding the polls.

After reviewing the situation, the Standing Committee concluded that holding local government elections before January 2027 would not be practical.

A Standing Committee member, requesting anonymity, said, "The law and order situation has still not improved as expected. If the government cannot hold peaceful elections, it will have a negative impact."

During the discussion, Salahuddin assured the leaders that law and order would improve significantly within a short period.

Sources familiar with the meeting said they discussed how the worsening gas and power shortages have disrupted industries, power plants and fertiliser factories since July 22. Many households are also receiving little or no gas for cooking.

The gas shortage has reduced electricity generation and sharply increased outages. Last week, the power deficit exceeded 2,500 megawatts, up from less than 1,000MW earlier, the sources said.

Senior leaders warned that prolonged disruptions could fuel public dissatisfaction, hurt industrial production and put further pressure on the economy. They urged immediate administrative and technical measures to improve gas supplies and boost power generation.

Sources said the leaders decided to form, reconstitute or reorganise committees at different levels across the country ahead of the local government elections.

They also discussed strengthening the party's grassroots organisation, improving coordination among leaders and activists, and resolving internal disputes.

The meeting further reviewed the government's state reform initiatives and preparations for the BNP's national council.

The Standing Committee also reviewed recent political developments, including programmes announced by opposition parties to mark the July mass uprising anniversary, and clashes between BNP and National Citizen Party activists in different areas.

$20,000 US visa bond now mandatory

FROM PAGE 12

of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Treasury to assess the feasibility of administering a visa bond programme, has provided sufficient data to suggest that a visa bond programme is an effective tool for enforcing compliance among bonded visa holders."

In the pilot programme, consular officers could require bonds of $5,000, $10,000 or up to $15,000. The final rule eliminates the $5,000 option and raises the maximum bond to $20,000.

The final rule goes into effect on August 3 when it is scheduled for publication in the Federal Register.

In the list of 50 countries for whose citizens this program applies, 30 are from Africa. The list includes Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Citizens of these countries applying for US tourist or business visas will now need to post a bond as a standard, permanent requirement, not a temporary pilot measure. This could affect students, workers and families from the region who travel to the US regularly or plan to in future.

US officials say the policy is intended to reduce visa overstays. State Department officials call the 2025 visa bond pilot a success. In 2024, nearly 45,500 visitors from the 50 listed countries overstayed their visas. In the pilot's first 10 months, that number dropped to fewer than 50 among covered applicants, according to the notice.

Immigration advocates argue it will deter legitimate travel to the United States.

Jamaat man arrested

FROM PAGE 12

confirmed Abdul Motin, officer-in-charge of Paba Police Station.

According to police, Faruk has long been providing healthcare services as a village doctor in the area. He also runs a pharmacy attached to his home, where he and his wife provide private tuition to children.

According to the case statement, the victim went to Faruk's house for private lessons on July 12. After she arrived, he sent the other students away and sexually harassed her.

After returning home, the girl broke down in tears and told her mother about the incident, the statement read.

Contacted by The Daily Star, the victim's mother said that when she confronted the accused's father, he advised her family not to pursue the matter and instead settle it between themselves.

"They are influential people, so we remained silent. But when news of the incident spread and police found out, they took Faruk into custody."

She demanded exemplary punishment for the accused.

Abdur Rahman Milon, chief of Jamaat's Boro Gachhi union unit, said Faruk is a full member of the party, while his brother serves as a ward secretary.

He claimed that BNP activists were exaggerating the incident.

"As far as I have heard, the incident took place quite some time ago. It had already been settled between the two families. Now BNP people have called the police and had him picked up."

Asked whether the party had taken any organisational action despite the incident having occurred some time ago, Milon said he had only recently become aware of it.

"I came to know about it only recently. I have already informed the responsible leaders. An investigation will now be conducted. If he is found guilty, organisational action will be taken."

Inside house of horror

FROM PAGE 12

the 2024 political changeover. Piles of debris still litter many of the rooms.

The narrow entrance on the ground floor, tucked beside a staircase, offers little clue to what lies inside. Visitors must lower their heads to squeeze through a cramped passage barely wide enough for one person. A few steps later, the passage opens into a maze of dim, narrow corridors lined with windowless concrete chambers.

Some of the chambers are so small they resemble concrete graves more than prison cells.

On the ground floor, investigators showed seven such compartments measuring roughly two feet by four feet, with ceilings so low that even a child would struggle to stand upright. An adult could do little more than sit with knees pressed against the chest. There was no sunlight, no fresh air, only a water tap and a small drainage opening through which detainees were forced to urinate and defecate.

Prosecutors, citing victims, said these are called the "cells of death". They said that after the change of government in 2024, a wall had been built to seal off the entrance to these cells. Investigators later broke down the wall during their inquiry.

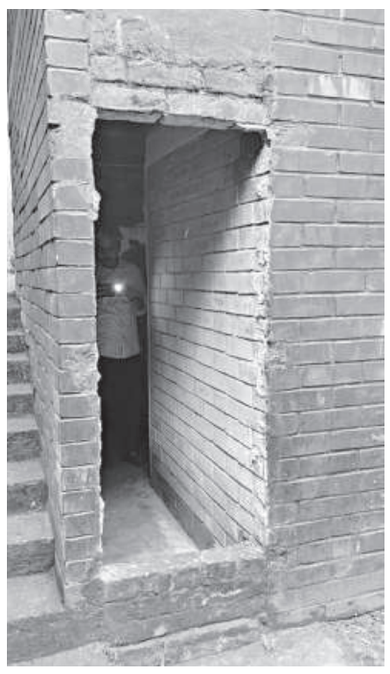
"Those seven cells were known as death cells because those taken there either never returned alive or were later taken away to be killed," Prosecutor Shyikh Mahdi, a member of the investigation team probing enforced disappearance cases, told The Daily Star during the visit.

Mahdi alleged that many detainees were injected with heavy sedatives before being taken away unconscious, shot dead, their abdomens slit open, their bodies wrapped in sacks and dumped into rivers.

According to him, the TFI facility was operated by Rab's intelligence wing until the fall of the Awami League government following the July uprising.

Outside the cells stood Sanjida Islam Tulee, coordinator of Maayer Daak, whose brother Sajedul Islam Sumon has remained missing since his enforced disappearance in December 2013.

"What we have learned is that my brother was picked up by Rab-1 members. We believe he was kept in one of these death cells," she told The Daily Star.



Entrance to Aynaghar

"There can be no greater violation of human rights than this," she said, demanding punishment for those responsible.

Although the building's western wall stands only a few yards from the busy Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, prosecutors said no outsider could have known what was happening inside because the cells had no windows, only a few openings for exhaust fans.

Another staircase descends to a lower section containing 10 more small cells – five on each side of a narrow corridor. Each measures about five feet by eight feet and can only be entered through another low, narrow doorway. Every cell has an open hole to be used as toilet.

Prosecutors said current Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed had been held in one of those cells for several days before being forcibly pushed across the Indian border.

Rab personnel assigned to guard the TFI cells, also referred to as the "hospital", stayed in another section of the ground floor.

Because the building has no electricity connection, prosecutors accompanying journalists carried torchlights throughout the inspection.

The first floor contains another 10 cells, each measuring about 14 feet by four to five feet. Another section houses two larger so-called VIP cells each with a small attached toilet.

Mir Quasem Bin Arman, now Jamaat lawmaker was allegedly held in one of the VIP cells for around eight years before being released, prosecutors said.

Directly opposite the VIP cells are three soundproof interrogation rooms, prosecutors said. The rooms once contained equipment including a motor-powered rotating steel chair and electric shock tools used to torture detainees.

Those on trial in two cases concerning alleged enforced disappearances and secret detentions at the TFI Cell and the Joint Interrogation Cell allegedly operated by DGFI include deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and several former Rab officials who have denied the allegations.

"Many people may think the stories about the Aynaghar are nothing more than rumours. But this is the grim reality," Chief Prosecutor Aminul at a briefing at Rab-1 premises after the inspection.

"Several victims came out of the detention cells after August 5, 2024. We still do not know the whereabouts or fate of more than 250 victims of enforced disappearance, including Ilias Ali and Sumon."

Asked whether those responsible for allegedly destroying evidence at the TFI Cell would be brought to justice, Aminul said investigators would look into the matter.

ABM Hamidul Mishbah, a defence lawyer representing some of the accused Rab officials, told the briefing that the prosecution had failed to make any specific allegation that his clients had detained victims at the facility. "What is stated in the formal charge does not match what is here," he said.

Infantino's U-turn

FROM PAGE 12

unite and improve," Infantino said.

"As a result, this proposal will not proceed."

He added that the project had been designed to strengthen member associations but acknowledged that it had become too divisive.

"Having listened carefully to all the views, it has become clear that the project has created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place," he said.

Infantino pledged to rebuild consensus, saying he would bring stakeholders together "in the spirit of shared interest in our game."

UEFA, however, issued a scathing response, saying the damage to trust had already been done.

"The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family," the European governing body said.

It accused Infantino of abandoning promises of transparency that helped him win election in 2016.

"On both these promises, he has failed to deliver," UEFA said.

"The shabby, back room, opaque deal he hatched and tried to force through was anything but transparent."

UEFA also argued that FIFA, with reserves of more than $5 billion, should already be using its own resources to benefit the game instead of seeking outside investors.

The AFC welcomed FIFA's decision to withdraw the proposal but stressed that any initiative affecting global football should be "presented and discussed with the Confederations, the FIFA Council, Member Associations and other stakeholders in a timely, transparent and meaningful manner."

The controversy represents the most significant challenge to Infantino's authority since he became FIFA president in 2016. Having previously secured two unopposed re-elections and expected to seek another term next year, he now faces growing criticism from some of the world's most influential football bodies.

A life rooted in language

FROM PAGE 3

Tanvir Haider Chaudhury, son of Prof Chaudhury and CEO of Kazi Food Industries, shared glimpses of his father, who was abducted when Tanvir was only four years old.

He recalled how he and his late brother, Sumon, would eagerly ask their father what he had brought for them when he returned from Dhaka University.

"A heart full of love," their father would initially reply, laughing at their disappointed faces before pulling gifts from his pockets.

Tanvir also recalled the chilling irony of the abductors telling his father not to eat lunch at home, claiming that "arrangements for food" had been made at their destination.

He said the trauma of December 14, 1971, remained a defining moment for the family. It happened at his uncle's house in Tikatuli just before lunch.

Masked men speaking in Bangla arrived, addressing his father as "Sir" and assuring the distraught family that they would return him shortly. One of the abductors' masks slipped, revealing Chowdhury Mueen Uddin, who was later convicted in absentia for war crimes, he said.

Tanvir also spoke about his father's academic legacy.

Prof Chaudhury stood first class first in Bangla Honours at Calcutta University in 1946, securing record-breaking marks in a hundred years at the Bangla department.

Addressing contemporary socio-political shifts, Tanvir expressed concern that the "July spirit" was being used to distance the nation from its Bangla roots and Rabindranath Tagore.

He said during the recent student-led movements, he found himself posting Tagore's poems on social media because of their relevance to the struggle against injustice.

"It is surprising that some now suggest we must abandon Tagore to embrace the July spirit," he said, emphasising that his father lived and died for a vision of universal humanism and a secular Bangalee identity that should not be discarded.

Tanvir said his father's 1971 diary revealed a deep commitment to the idea of "Bangladesh" long before it became a reality, with entries describing students marching with the new flag in March 1971.

He said the nation must return to the martyrs' ideals of a secular, liberal society to truly honour them.

Educationist and historian Prof Perween Hasan recalled Prof Chaudhury as a quiet, disciplined and deeply principled man whose outlook was shaped by Santiniketan.

"He did not merely study at Santiniketan; he carried Santiniketan within him," she said, adding that his speech, conduct and commitment to Bangalee culture set him apart.

She said he had drawn up plans for "Ananda Kanan", a nature-based school modelled on Santiniketan that he hoped would one day become a university.

Prof Souvik Reza of the Department of Bangla at Rajshahi University said Prof Chaudhury's martyrdom had ultimately overshadowed his birth centenary because of his sacrifice and intellectual legacy.

Rooted in the environment of Tagore's Santiniketan, Chaudhury's diverse works -- spanning stories, poems and essays -- carried a deep political consciousness. Though not a politician, he could not evade the political realities of a turbulent era, Reza said.

During the 1971 non-cooperation movement, the otherwise composed scholar displayed rare fervour, reciting a passionate poem at the Bangla Academy, he added.

Chaudhury's literary contributions, notably his 1963 book "Robi Parikrama", were praised by Dr Muhammad Shahidullah for illuminating Tagore's genius.

Reza said Chaudhury viewed literature as a "crystal" with multifaceted truths rather than an exact science, applying this humanist perspective to figures such as Vidyasagar and contemporary young writers whom he championed.

He said if Prof Chaudhury were asked about his identity today, he would likely reply with the simple yet profound realisation: "I am still awakened".

The event was moderated by The Daily Star journalist Emran Mahfuz.