

Fuel crisis continues to cripple N-dists

Govt points at smuggling, decides to watch filling stations along borders

Star Report

The ongoing fuel crisis continues to make life miserable particularly in the northern region as the authorities are still unable to supply petrol and octane.

The government however started releasing diesel on a limited scale in a bid to resolve farmers' problems in irrigating their lands for boro cultivation.

Petrol and octane were not released from the fuel depot at Kazirhat in Pabna, which was opened 25-kilometre downstream of Baghabari on Sunday as there were not enough safety measures in place for releasing such highly inflammable fuel.

Apparently blaming smuggling of fuel the main reason for the crisis, the government yesterday also decided to monitor the filling stations along the bordering areas, which get more supply of oil than necessary.

The home ministry, which claimed to have sealed off 13 points in the rivers along the coastal belt areas and Teknaf, asked the Bangladesh Navy and Coastguard to submit a list of new water routes of smugglers and an action plan by today.

The smugglers are now using small dinghies and engine boats instead of ships so that they can sail across the narrow channels with fertiliser and oil, the National Committee to Prevent Smuggling was told yesterday.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, who chaired the meeting, also ordered all deputy commissioners (DC) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) to involve the community in waging an anti-smuggling campaign across the country. The DCs and the UNOs will sit at least once a week with local traders and leaders of cross-section of people to stop the smuggling of oil and fertiliser. The community involvement campaign will go on for three months.

Our Bogra correspondent reports that only 750 tonnes of diesel was released from the new depot at Kazirhat. Authorities were trying to bring fresh consignments of petrol and octane from Khulna to various northern destinations by rail wagons.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports that fuel crisis in the northern districts remained severe making

serious trouble for irrigation in the boro fields.

At many places farmers and vehicle owners were locked in altercation with the fuel dealers when they found the selling of diesel and petrol stopped. Most of the filling stations in these districts remained closed yesterday.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), meanwhile, hoped that the fuel crisis in the north would be solved within 24 hours after the commissioning of the temporary depot at Kazirhat. But it could supply fuel to meet the huge demand.

A large number of tank lorries from eight petroleum-hungry northern districts rushed to Kazirhat yesterday to procure fuel but the BPC failed to deliver fuel to the most of them, said the owner of Balaka Filling Station in Rangpur.

Meanwhile, a number of filling stations, which could reserve fuel, are selling diesel at higher rate. Petrol is selling at Tk 48 to 50 per litre while the diesel at Tk 38 to 40.

The farmers, who need diesel for irrigation, are in great anxiety for the fuel crisis.

Energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman last night told BBC Bangla Service that he was suspecting the current situation as an effect of fuel smuggling.

"In our estimate 50,000 tonnes of diesel has been withdrawn in the last four days," he said. "I simply don't understand where in Bangladesh such a huge quantity of diesel has been used," he added.

North Bengal Is Still In Fuel Crisis : Govt Blames Fuel Trafficking

The North part of the country is still in severe fuel crisis. The government has given its best effort for it. The government has started releasing diesel for farmers so that the farmers do not face the problem of boro cultivation. The government is blaming illegal trafficking for that crisis and took decision to monitor the petrol pumps and borders. To protect trafficking Ministry of Home Affairs has asked the Bangladesh Navy and Coastguard to submit the list of new water routes and has already sealed off 13 river points. Yesterday the National Committee to Prevent Smuggling has said the smugglers are now using small boats to cross narrow water channel. The committee has also ordered all deputy commissioners (DC) and upazila nirbahi officers (UNO) to make a committee locally with local traders and leaders of cross-section of people to protect oil and fertilizer trafficking within three months and the meeting will sit in at least once a week. The daily star Bogra correspondent reposts that, only 750 tones of diesel has released from Kazirhat depot and the authority is trying to bring oil from Khulna by rail wagons.

Many filling stations in northern part remained closed yesterday. Meanwhile the oil stations which can reserve fuel are selling petrol at Tk 48 to 50/liter and the diesel at Tk 38 to 40. The farmers are in great anxiety for fuel crisis. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) is hoping this crisis will be solved within 24 hours after commissioning the temporary depot at Kazirhat.

Last night Energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman told BBC Bangla Service that he is suspecting that the crisis is happening because of trafficking. He also added in his estimate within last four days 50,000 tones of diesel have withdrawn.

Source: The Daily Star, 31 January 2006

Tata unhappy with prolonged negotiations

Jasim Uddin Khan

Tata is unhappy about the delay in talks with the government about its proposed \$2.5-3 billion investment plan for Bangladesh, a top negotiator of the company has said.

"We should not expect we could complete all formalities as speedily as we do in an European country. But obviously, if we find the investment negotiation is being delayed long enough, we may reconsider our plan," said Alan Rosling, executive director of Tata Sons Ltd, in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Sunday.

"We have already lost six months for negotiation", pointed out Rosling, who arrived in Dhaka earlier on the day to participate in the final round of negotiation with the government that started yesterday.

He strongly disagreed with the government proposal to set a higher price for a guaranteed gas supply for 20 years.

Rosling noted that mills across the world produce steel using gas at a price that is considered economically viable and with its supply secured. "You will not invest \$3.0 billion where gas supply might stop tomorrow," he said.

The government offer for 1.25 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) gas supply is inadequate as Tata will need 2.16 Tcf gas for its steel plant (for 25 years) and power and fertiliser plants (20 years each).

The government however suggested Tata to use coal as an alternative energy source but the company does not view this as an alternative.

"We need a certain amount of gas for the economic life line for our projects. But coal cannot be a substitute for gas. Now, it depends on the government if it would agree to offer gas to Tata or not," Rosling said.

"If the government agrees to supply gas for the steel plant, only then Tata can consider setting up a steel plant.



Alan Rosling

Otherwise, it will not go for the steel unit."

If Tata believed that gas is an issue in Bangladesh, it would not have come here or started the process of investment.

The Tata executive is hammering on a good package of tax incentives. "If you like to have infrastructure projects, the major capital projects whose payback period is 10 years or 20 years, you have to provide a good package of incentives to the investors," he said.

He mentioned that the government negotiators have already agreed to develop a package of incentives for the projects.

Asked why they have chosen Bangladesh as their major FDI destination, Rosling said Bangladesh has various opportunities, which may help reduce cost of production.

The cost of funds and land may be high in Bangladesh but the exchange rate will create better opportunity for the projects here compared to other countries in South Asia, the Tata negotiator said.

He claimed that the Tata investment will help increase gross domestic product (GDP) by almost two percent and directly create 26,000 jobs. Moreover, it will speed up economic development and improve the balance of payment situation. Eventually, these factors will give positive signals about the creditability of Bangladesh to other foreign investors.

The Tata executive thought Bangladesh's population of around 140 million, 5-6 percent economic growth rate a year, democratic order and its location in association with the growing South Asian economy show it has tremendous potential.

Rosling observed that Tata investment would also help expand relations with India and build integration among the South Asian countries.

He expressed disagreement with the common public impression in India that the rising Islamist element in Bangladesh is a major problem and said this element is not strong to act as a barrier to investment.

On April 20 last year, Tata submitted its \$2.5 billion investment proposal for setting up a 1,000 MW power station, a steel mill with an annual production capacity of 420,000 tonnes and a one million-tonne fertiliser unit.

Later on May 9, the government and Tata agreed to begin negotiations from May 25, conclude it by August 31 and sign the agreements before November 30 the same year.

TATA Is Not Happy About The Negotiation Process

A top negotiator of TATA has said TATA is not happy about the negotiation process of proposed \$2.5-3 billion investment. Alan Rosling, executive director of TATA Sons Ltd, in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on Sunday has alarmed, if it took too much time they may think again about the investment. Yesterday the final round of negotiation with the government has started where Rosling led the part of TATA.

He strongly disagreed with the proposal from government of high gas price. The government suggested them to use coal instead of gas, but TATA also disagreed with that suggestion. He said mills across other countries produce steel using gas at a price that is considered economically viable and with its secured supply. It's not possible where there is no guaranteed supply of gas. TATA alarmed, if the government cannot supply gas properly it wouldn't be possible for them to setup a steel plant. TATA is trying to gain a good TAX incentive from our part. In one question answer Rosling said they wanted to do their project in Bangladesh because of less cost of production, low exchange rate.

He claimed, their investment may increase our GDP by two percent, 26,000 people will get job, increase our economic development, balance payment and make a positive image for foreign investment. He is very much hopeful about our economic development. He hoped this investment will develop the bilateral relationship with India and also with other South-Asian countries. He said rising Islamist element in Bangladesh is a not major barrier for their investment. Last year, TATA submitted its \$2.5 billion investment proposal for setting up a 1,000 Mega Watt power station, a steel mill with an annual production capacity of 420,000 tons and a one million-ton fertilizer. On May 9, the government and TATA agreed to begin negotiations. It concluded on August 31 and signed the agreements before November 30 the same year.

Source: The Daily Star, 7 February 2006

PM seeks Turkish investment in potential sectors

Unb, Ankara

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said here yesterday Bangladesh has successfully entered the global investment map and is eager to be a serious partner of the global economic community.

"We have already liberalised our economy. Most of our sectors have been opened to foreign direct investment. We offer very attractive incentives to foreign investors," she said, urging the Turkish companies to invest in promising and potential sectors of Bangladesh.

The prime minister made the remarks while addressing a business meeting organised by Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchange of Turkey at TOBB Headquarters.

Khaleda said her government attaches high priority to power generation and oil and gas exploration.

Expressing happiness that some Turkish firms are already involved in infrastructure development projects in Bangladesh, she hoped that more leading Turkish investors would participate in developing telecommunications, civil constructions, railways and roads.

About foreign investment, she mentioned that the net annual FDI inflow to Bangladesh has increased by 34 percent and said large TNCs like Orascom of Egypt, Tata Group of India, Dhahi Group of UAE, Lafarge of France and TMI of Malaysia have already started investing in Bangladesh.

The total investment outlay of these five companies are expected to exceed \$5billion in next three years, she said adding that the recent increase in interest among foreign investors from various countries indicates that Bangladesh has successfully entered the global investment map.

Referring to Bangladesh's natural resources, Khaleda said Bangladesh is endowed with a large reserve of both natural gas and high quality coal that makes the country suitable for establishing energy-intensive manufacturing industries.

On Dhaka-Ankara bilateral trade, the prime minister said since the two-way trade is not up to its potential, "We need to work together to identify the areas of cooperation to harness the existing potential."

Khaleda said Bangladesh offers competitive prices as well as quality for pharmaceuticals, footwear, ceramic, handicrafts, jute goods, leather goods, frozen food and agricultural products.

She said Turkey might consider importing these products from Bangladesh and benefit by

introducing Bangladeshi products to meet the demands of CIS countries.

The prime minister hoped that businessmen from both sides would be able to identify opportunities for industrial investment and trade for mutual benefit.

She said the emergence of global production systems has now created new opportunities for compatible economies. Private sectors of Turkey and Bangladesh can coordinate among themselves to develop a competitive supply-chain for global consumption.

Khaleda said Bangladeshi products enjoy GSP privileges in the EU and duty and quota free access to most markets of the developed countries including Canada, Australia and Japan. "Such preferential treatment gives us unique market access and comparative cost advantages over other competing countries."

Presidents of TOBB and FBCCI also spoke at the function.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, Bangladesh business delegation and Turkish businessmen attended the function.

Turkish Investments Are Coming

Bangladesh has successfully entered the global investment map and is eager to be a serious partner of the global economic community said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in Ankara, Turkey on last day. She also added, "We have already liberalized our economy. Most of our sectors have been opened to foreign direct investment. We offer very attractive incentives to foreign investors". The business meeting of Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchange of Turkey at TOBB Headquarters she made the remarks while addressing. Khaleda said there the government gives high priority to power generation and oil and gas exploration. Some Turkish firms are already involved in infrastructure development projects in Bangladesh. She hoped that more leading Turkish investors will invest for telecommunications development, civil constructions, railways and roads. The net annual FDI inflow to Bangladesh has increased by 34 percent and large TNCs like Orascom of Egypt, TATA Group of India, Dhabi Group of UAE, Lafarge of France and TMI of Malaysia have already started investing in Bangladesh which is very positive sign for foreign investment. In next three years, the total investment outlay of these five companies are expected to \$5billion plus. To make them more interested she referred Bangladesh's natural resources. Khaleda said Bangladesh has a large reserve of both natural gas and high quality coal that makes the country suitable for establishing energy-intensive manufacturing industries. She said on Dhaka-Ankara bilateral trade, "Since the two-way trade is not up to its potential, we need to work together to identify the areas of cooperation to harness the existing potential." Khaleda said about the competitive price and quality of pharmaceuticals, footwear, ceramic, handicrafts, jute goods, leather goods, frozen food and agricultural products. To meet the demands of CIS countries Turkey might consider importing these products from Bangladesh and benefit by introducing Bangladeshi products she hoped. She also hoped that both side businesses will help to identify industrial investment opportunity and trade for mutual benefits. The emergence of global production systems has now created new opportunities for compatible economies she said. Private sectors of both countries can coordinate among themselves for the development of a competitive supply-chain for global consumption. Khaleda said our products enjoy GSP privileges in the European Union. We get duty and quota free access to most markets of the developed countries including Canada, Australia and Japan. She said "Such preferential treatment gives us unique market access and comparative cost advantages over other competing countries". Presidents of both TOBB and FBCCI spoke on the function too. From Bangladeshi part Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, Bangladesh business delegation and Turkish businessmen attended there.

Source: The Daily Star, 14 April 2006

Delhi barriers on Dhaka jute goods

Indian customs delays clearance, tries to push goods into higher tax categories

Monjur Mahmud

India has restricted import of jute products from Bangladesh by pushing up import duties substantially and by imposing other non-tariff barriers.

According to sources, the restriction has been imposed to discourage Indian importers as import of jute products from Bangladesh rose by more than 500 percent during April-November period in 2005-06 financial year.

Submissions of chemical testing certificates have become mandatory for Bangladeshi traders who export twines. The certificates to be issued by the Indian authorities will have to mention that the twines do not have oil content over three percent, sources said.

India has also increased tariff on jute products to 12 percent from eight percent. Previously, Indian importers were supposed to pay eight percent tax comprising six percent in duties, one percent countervailing duty (CVD) and one percent to the education fund in cases of imports from Saarc countries.

The basic duty for non-Saarc countries is 15 percent, plus two percent to the education fund and one percent as CVD, totalling 18 percent.

Indian importers now have to pay 15 percent duty on jute cuttings and four percent duty on raw jute that were zero duty items previously.

"We were hoping to export 30,000 metric tons of jute goods this fiscal against 7,000 metric tons of last year. But the new measures have stopped the flow," Shabbir Yusuf, chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJSA) told The Daily Star.

As a result, jute goods export to India has now gone down sharply, he said adding that the exporters still continue to export but the cumbersome barriers are making it very difficult for them.

Yusuf mentioned that the Indian producers earlier put pressure on their government to impose restriction on jute goods import from Bangladesh as the import rose sharply within a short span of time.

According to the statistics of Indian importers, jute products import from Bangladesh was 50,240 tons during April-November period in 2005-06 against 9,470 tons during the same period of 2004-05, BJSA chairman said.

Meanwhile, the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh recently identified testing requirements, harmonised system (HS) code classification, customs valuation, special labelling requirements for jute bags, mandatory standards requirement and technical regulations are

some of the barriers the exporters are facing to continue their export to India.

EPB recently received an explanation from the commercial wing of Bangladesh deputy high commission in Kolkata and sent a letter with the explanation attached to it to different trade bodies whose members export to India.

The Office of Jute Commissioner of India has made mandatory for all imported jute bags to carry markings on individual bags declaring the country of origin, which must be machine stitched, the EPB letter said.

It is not clear as to why such requirements are imposed only on jute bags, while other packaging materials do not have to fulfil such conditions, it said.

According to available statistics, more than 90 percent of jute bags imported into India are from Bangladesh.

Indian customs authorities, in many cases, do not agree to the HS code classifications declared by Bangladeshi exporters. Apparently, the customs authorities attempt to classify the goods under such HS codes that are subjects to higher duties,

The Indian authorities also tend to take a long time for verification of prices, creating unnecessary delays in clearance, the letter mentioned.

According to official statistics, Bangladesh's import from India rose to \$1.18 billion during July-December 2005 while its export was \$105 million during the same period.

Barriers On Bangladeshi Jute Goods

India is creating barriers on the export of Bangladeshi jute products by pushing up import duties and imposing other non-tariff barriers. The source has said the restriction has been imposed to discourage Indian importers. The import rose by more than five hundred percent during April-November period in 2005-06 financial year. Chemical testing certificates submissions have become mandatory for Bangladeshi traders who export twines which are issued by the Indian authorities. The authorities will have to mention that the twines do not have oil content over three percent.

Tariff on jute products to twelve percent from eight percent has also increased by India. The basic duty for non-SAARC countries is eighteen percent. Now Indian importers have to pay fifteen percent extra duties on jute cuttings and four percent duty on raw jute. Chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association Shabbir Yusuf told The Daily Star "We were hoping to export thirty thousands metric tons of jute goods this fiscal against seven thousand metric tons of last year. But the new measures have stopped the flow." Because of this, jute goods export to India has now gone down. He also added that the Indian producers earlier put pressure on their government to impose restriction on jute goods import from Bangladesh as the import rose sharply within a short span of time. Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association chairman said according the statistics of Indian importers jute products import from Bangladesh was fifty thousand and two hundred forty tons during April-November period in 2005-06 against nine thousand and four hundred seventy tons during the same period of 2004-05.

The Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh recently identified some of the barriers the exporters are facing to continue their export to India. Among them there are identified testing requirements, harmonized system code classification, customs valuation, special labeling requirements for jute bags, mandatory standards requirement and technical regulations. The Export Promotion Bureau letter said, The Indian Office of Jute Commissioner has made mandatory for all imported jute bags to carry markings on individual bags informing the country of origin, which must be machine stitched. Ninety percent plus jute bags imported into India are from Bangladesh according to statistical data. In many cases, Indian customs, do not agree to our harmonized system code classifications. Moreover, the customs attempt to classify the goods under such harmonized system codes which are subjects to higher duties! They also tend to take a long time for verification of prices, creating unnecessary delays in clearance. Our import from India is \$1.18 billion during July-December 2005 while its export was \$105 million during the same period, according to official statistics.

Source: The Daily Star, 16 April 2006

Pahela Baishakh

Celebration turns into human sea

Staff Correspondent

Resolved to uphold Bengali cultural heritage, thousands of people on Friday poured into the streets, parks and open spaces across the capital and elsewhere to celebrate Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

Irrespective of religion and age, they welcomed the first day of the Bangla year 1413 with fanfare and festivity, shrugging off the threat of militant attacks.

The biggest cultural festival of the Bangalees began with Tagore's song "Esho hey Baishakh Esho Esho" sung by the artistes of Chhayanaut at the city's Ramna Batamul.

Alongside Ramna Park, the Dhaka University campus, Central Shahid Minar, Dhanmondi, and Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area too were swarming with people throughout the day.

Great many varieties of handicrafts and artefacts were displayed and sold at Baishakhi Melas in different parts of the capital.

Women in dazzling white saris with red borders and men clad in punjabis roamed the city streets, exulting at the arrival of the new year.

Different organisations brought out processions and organised musical programmes, fairs and cake festivals to mark the day.

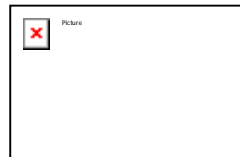
Students of the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University took out traditional Mangal Shobhajatra in the morning with thousands of revellers wearing chequered masks.

At Ramna Botomul, artistes of Chhayanaut sang songs, and recited poems and essays eulogising thousand years old traditional way of Bangalee life. The much-awaited function concluded peacefully with the singing of the national anthem.

To accommodate vast numbers of people, vehicles were not allowed on the roads stretching from Karwan Bazar to Shahbagh, Matshya Bhaban to Shahbagh to Doyel Chattar. Still, the traffic systems around Dhaka University, Ramna and Dhanmondi Lake came to a standstill.

Pahela Baishakh has its origin in the Mughal period when Emperor Akbar introduced the Bangla calendar to ease tax collection. In course of time, it evolved into a day of celebrations and an integral part of Bangalee culture and tradition.

The traders and shopkeepers open Halkhata (fresh accounts book) on this day and



The students of Fine Arts Institute bring out a colourful procession marking the beginning of Bangla year 1413. The photo was taken on the Pahela Baishakh at Shahbagh in the capital. PHOTO: STAR

entertain their customers with sweets.

Concern for security could not contain the wave of enthusiastic visitors as they rushed to the heart of celebration -- Ramna and Dhaka University campus.

Around 10,000 members of law enforcement agencies in uniform and plain clothes kept a close eye on the movement of people towards Ramna Park and other places.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) conducted a sweep of the festival venues with the dog squad. A number of closed-circuit television cameras and metal detectors were installed as part of stepped up security.

Thousands queued up at the entrance points of Ramna to get inside while artists spread across the area were busy painting motifs on the cheeks of visitors.

Different social, political and cultural organisations took up elaborate programmes to welcome the Bangla New Year. The organisations included Chhayanaut, Alliance Française de Dhaka, Proshika, Oitijhya, Nagar Samajik O Sangskritik Kendra.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) brought out a colourful procession in the city marking the day.

Starting from Bahadur Shah Park in Old Dhaka, the procession ended at Ramna Park after parading through Gulistan, Bangabandhu Avenue and National Press Club areas.

Thousands of party activists and common people participated in the vibrantly coloured procession, carrying banners and festoons. Elegantly decorated elephants, horse carts, and the party's election symbol 'boat' on trucks and rickshaw vans caught the attention of the pedestrians.

AL Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed and Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader led the procession.

Earlier in the morning, AL President Sheikh Hasina exchanged New Year greetings with party leaders and workers at her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmondi.

President Prof Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and other political leaders gave separate messages on the occasion.

The national dailies brought out special supplements while Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and different private channels aired special programmes.

Celebration Of Pahela Boishakh 1413

Thousands of people came out on Friday to celebrate the first day of Bangla New Year. Irrespective of age-religion, people welcomed the first day of Bangla 1413 with a great festivity, ignoring the threat of militant attacks. At the city's Ramna Batamul the largest cultural festival of the day began with Tagore's song "Esho hey Baishakh Esho Esho" sung by the artistes of "Chhayanaut". They also recited poems and essays eulogizing thousand years old traditional way of Bangalee life. This function concluded peacefully with the singing of the national anthem. Ramna Park, the Dhaka University campus, Central Shahid Minar, Dhanmondi, and Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area were full of people throughout the day. Baishakhi Melas in different parts of the capital were arranged. Great many varieties of handicrafts and artifacts were displayed and sold there. To celebrate the day different organizations arranged processions and organized musical programs, fairs and cake festivals. Dhaka University's Fine Arts Institute Students took out traditional Mangal Shobhajatra in the morning with thousands of revelers wearing colorful masks. No vehicles were allowed on the roads stretching from Karwan Bazar to Shahbagh, Matshya Bhaban to Shahbagh to Doyel Chattar for well accommodation. In Mughal period Emperor Akbar introduced the Bangla calendar to ease tax collection. In course of time, it has become a day of celebration and an integral part of Bangalee culture and tradition. On the day, the traders and shopkeepers open Halkhata (fresh accounts book) and entertain their customers with sweets which is also a part of our tradition. About 10,000 law enforcement agencies members in uniform and plain clothes kept an alert eye on the movement of people towards Ramna Park and other areas. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) was with their dog squad. A good number of closed-circuit television cameras and metal detectors were installed for security.

To welcome the Bangla New Year different programs were arranged by different social, political and cultural organizations; such as: Chhayanaut, Alliance Française de Dhaka, Proshika, Oitijhya, Nagar Samajik O Sangskritik Kendra. Awami League (AL) brought out a colorful procession in the city to marking the day which started from Bahadur Shah Park in Old Dhaka, the procession ended at Ramna Park after parading through Gulistan, Bangabandhu Avenue and National Press Club areas. Thousands of party activists and common people were participated in the procession carrying banners and festoons. Beautifully decorated elephants, horse carts, and the party's election symbol 'boat' on trucks and rickshaw vans caught the attention of the people. President, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and other political leaders gave separate messages on the occasion. The national dailies published special supplements and Bangladesh Radio, BTV and different private channels aired special programs.

Source: The Daily Star, 16 April 2006

Cabinet Approves Contempt Bill

Media can publish news on judges' personal activities

Staff Correspondent

The cabinet yesterday approved contempt of court bill allowing the newspapers to publish news on the judges' personal behaviours and activities.

In a meeting presided over by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the cabinet also approved Micro-credit Regulatory Authority (MCRA) Act, 2006, and bills on cable TV operation, and accreditation.

The proposed contempt of court legislation if enacted will permit newspapers to publish news; constructive criticism and features on the way judges conduct their personal lives. It also permits the media factual criticism of the appeal cases.

In the approved bill, contempt of court has been specifically defined.

Contempt charges can be brought against any person for intentionally defying or ignoring or showing disrespect to any court's verdict, decree, or order by any written or oral expression or gestures or visual means.

The draft law provides for a maximum six months of jail and a fine of Tk 5,000 as punishment for committing contempt. However, an accused will be able to secure bail on paying a bond until passing of a judgement.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed had earlier told the press that the courts still act on 80-year-old Contempt of Courts Act-1926, which is incomplete and hence creating confusion for not being well defined.

The government employees in the proposed law will not lose their jobs immediately after they are alleged of wrongdoing. In the bill the responsibility has been given to the government to acquit or punish government officials.

Meanwhile, sources said government earlier amended the Public Servants Act (Dismissal on Conviction), 1985 to save government officials from losing their jobs. Any accused would only lose his or her job if the official was fined more than Tk 10,000. The amount was Tk 1,000 earlier.

In the contempt of court bill the highest punishment one could get is Tk 5,000 or six-month imprisonment or both. Earlier this was Tk 2,000 or six-month imprisonment.

Legal experts said the two acts suggest it has been made to save the government officials as

the Contempt of Court Act cannot fine them more than Tk 5,000.

Another expert said the existence of these two bills together would demean the court and government officials would be encouraged to ignore courts and hamper the courts in exercising.

The cabinet-approved Micro-credit Regulatory Authority (MCRA) Act, 2006 has not included the proposal for opening small banks in the rural areas and incorporated a provision for microcredit irregularities to be dealt with at the criminal courts.

A previous draft of the MCRA act had the proposal for opening small banks in the rural areas. But the government did not okay it, thinking that overnight emergence of hundreds of banks might make it hard for them to handle those.

The government-run microcredit programme will be outside the purview of the just approved draft of MCRA act.

According to the draft, violators of the MCRA act will be sentenced to a maximum one-year imprisonment and fined Tk five lakh.

The Bangladesh Bank governor will be chairman of the MCRA board while the government will select six officials or individuals as members of the board. An executive vice-chairman will be made chief executive officer of MCRA.

UNB adds: The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of the Cable Television Operation Act 2006 to ensure cable-television network programmes run "in conformity with the social, cultural and religious values of the country".

According to sources, the new law is being made to regulate the airing of various unauthorised, confusing and immoral programmes on cable TVs.

Besides, the Bangladesh Accreditation Act 2006 was okayed to facilitate development of an accreditation system for national laboratories, capable of ensuring regional and multinational recognition and acceptability of conformity-assessment certificates.

Judges' Personal Activity Can Be Published According To New Bill

In a meeting held on last day presided by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia some bills have been approved. They were contempt of court bill, Micro-credit Regulatory Authority (MCRA) Act, 2006, and bills on cable TV operation and accreditation. According to new contempt of court bill the newspapers can publish news on the judges' personal life. The bill also permits newspapers to publish criticism of the appeal cases. In that bill definition of contempt of court defined specifically. Contempt charge can be brought if any body intentionally defying or ignoring or showing disrespect to any court's verdict, decree, or order by any written or oral expression or gestures or visual means. Punishment for committing contempt is a maximum six months of jail and a fine of Tk. 5,000. An accused will be able to secure bail on paying a bond until passing of a judgment. The bill is very important because the courts still act on 80-year-old Contempt of Courts Act-1926, which is incomplete and hence creating confusion for not being well defined. For this new bill the government officers will not lose their job very easily. The responsibility for punishment will be handled by government. Sources said, to save government officials from losing their jobs government earlier amended the Public Servants Act (Dismissal on Conviction), 1985. Legal experts said that, this act has been made to save government officials. Another expert said the existence of these two bills together would demean the court and government officials would be encouraged to ignore courts and hamper the courts in exercising.

The cabinet has approved Micro-credit Regulatory Authority (MCRA) Act, 2006. It has not included the proposal for opening small banks in the rural areas and incorporated a provision for micro credit irregularities to be dealt with at the criminal courts. On its previous draft the act had the proposal for opening small banks in the rural areas. But the government didn't approve it because of the problem of controlling. According to the draft the maximum punishment will be maximum one-year imprisonment and fined Tk. five lakh. Governor of Central Bank (Bangladesh Bank) will be the chairman of MCRA Board and the executive vice-chairman will be the CEO (chief executive officer). The government will select six officials or individuals as members of the board.

To ensure cable-television network programs run "in conformity with the social, cultural and religious values of the country" the cabinet approved the draft of the Cable Television Operation Act 2006. By this law the unauthorized, confusing and immoral programs on cable TVs will be regulated. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Accreditation Act 2006 was approved. It will facilitate development of an accreditation system for national laboratories, capable of ensuring regional and multinational recognition and acceptability of conformity-assessment certificates.

Source: The Daily Star, 18 April 2006