

Gas field deal

FROM PAGE 1 unnecessarily to transfer the ownership to BAPEX.

Petrobangla had raised objection to the Chhatak gas field as a marginal field. Chhatak's eastern part is a virgin area and can not be termed as marginal, it said. A marginal gas field means it has been explored and used or abandoned.

Niko argues that eastern Chhatak was the main attraction of the whole deal and if Petrobangla dropped it from joint venture, it would suffer heavily.

The joint venture deal would give Niko a minimum 60 per cent share and BAPEX a maximum 40 per cent -- depending on discovery and investment.

Though BAPEX has 40 per cent share, the financial structure in the joint venture has been designed in such a way that the Bangladeshi exploration company will not see any sign of profit before 10 years -- if any of these gas fields produce gas commercially, sources said. But Niko would enjoy the first priority of cost recovery like PSC operators.

Niko has been pursuing this deal by remaining outside the block negotiations since 1999. In order to strike a speedy deal with the government, the Canadian company wanted to avoid signing of the PSC, but now obtains tax relief from the government -- an incentive given exclusively to PSC operators.

Niko had recommended a price of US\$ 1.6 per unit for the joint venture's gas -- a price equivalent to that asked by the PSC operators in the country. PSC operators charge a minimum of US\$ 1.2 to 1.4 and a maximum of US\$ 2.4 to 2.7 per unit.

During the AL rule, Petrobangla raised several questions including Niko's profile as a joint venture and tax exemption sought by the company.

As these problems called for

amendment to certain rules, Petrobangla was asked to draft a policy. As a policy requires cabinet approval, a tardy process, the high-ups in the administration later instructed Petrobangla to work out a procedure, instead of a policy, to give Niko the green light.

A high-powered committee comprising four secretaries of the past government intervened and okayed a Niko proposal to exempt it from all taxes like 'other international oil companies'.

Petrobangla raised objection to it saying that no company is fully exempted from taxes. They said that as an incentive to the oil companies working under various Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs), Petrobangla itself pay the taxes.

But the Niko scheme is not a PSC operation -- it is a joint venture with BAPEX. If taxation has to be relaxed for Niko, BAPEX will have to face the penalty of paying all the taxes of a joint venture and thus lose the scope of profit-making from the deal, said a source.

Gold, forex seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at Zia International Airport seized gold bars worth Tk 32 lakh and foreign currencies worth Tk 5 lakh yesterday and Friday.

Customs officials searched a passenger, Alamgir Alam, and found 38 gold necklaces and 48 bracelets on him. He came to Dhaka from Dubai via Sylhet on a Biman flight.

On Friday, customs officials recovered \$8600 from a Dubai-bound passenger, Najmul Ahmed.

Doctor dies at Pabna jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Sushil Kumar Shah, a former residential medical officer of Pabna Mental Hospital, died at the Pabna Central Jail yesterday.

One of his relatives said a prayer for Sushil's bail on March 31 was rejected and he was sent to jail.

Later, the jail authorities informed his family members that Sushil has been admitted to the hospital.

When the family members went to the hospital, Sushil was already dead. Police are yet to hand over the body to his family.

College student murdered in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The body of a 3rd year honours student of BM University College was recovered from a ditch at Kaurania in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

Police said the student -- Morshed Akon, 21 -- was hacked by sharp weapons, as appeared from the wounds.

Sources said Morshed had married one Rozina Sultana, 19, about two years back but her family did not accept the marriage.

Morshed filed a criminal case against his father-in-law on April 9. Since then he was missing.

A case has been filed and Rozina and her mother Sufia Begum have been taken to custody.

Smoking

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forest minister Shajahan Siraj.

The other respondents are health secretary, food secretary, information secretary, industries secretary and environment and forest secretary.

In the plaint, it was said the ban was needed as smoking is highly detrimental to health and it leads to death of a large number of people.

The suit was filed by a lawyer, Firoz Kamrul Hasan. Advocates Shahjahan Khan, Shahidullah Khan, MA Malek, Abdul Haq Bhuiyan and Sirajul Islam represented him.

Boishabi

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version of the festival is a 'water session' when young girls spray water jets to one another. Before frisking in the water game, they offer jalpuja.

All the ethnic communities drink Do-Choani, Jogorah and Kanji, local alcoholic drinks.

The colourful rally, attended by a few hundred people including women and children, was the highlight of yesterday.

Men clad in Dhuti and Panjabi and women in Pinaun (a two-piece garment) lent traditional tinge to the occasion.

Deputy Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Moni Swapon Dewan told the Daily Star that the festival lost its lustre this year due to the restive world situation.

"The tribal people are aware of the invasion of Iraq which has dampened the mood of the festival," he said.



Top, from left: Lawyers carry a banner; leaders and activists of the Jatiya Party (Manju) bring out a procession; activists of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party march through streets; and City Awami League leaders lead a procession; bottom, from left: Women shout slogans beating utensils; hawkers carry toy tanks; journalists, press workers and employees march in a procession; and children call for peace during demonstrations in Dhaka against the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Saddam's half-brother 'safe and sound'

AFP, Beirut

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's half-brother, reportedly killed in a US airstrike, was traced by the Americans owing to a telephone call to his family in Switzerland, a Lebanese daily said yesterday.

"I am calling to tell you I am safe and sound," Barzan al-Tikriti said in a message he left on his family's answering machine at their home in Switzerland, said Al-Mostaqbal newspaper, quoting an Iraqi source "familiar with the last minutes of the Iraqi regime."

US intelligence operatives used the call to trace him to a farm in the Ramadi region west of Baghdad, it said.

Al-Mostaqbal, owned by Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, said the call was the first Barzan made since Saddam placed him under house arrest on March 5 in a villa in the Radwaniya palace compound near Baghdad's main airport.

But after US troops entered Baghdad, Barzan reportedly fled to his farm in Ramadi, 100 kilometres west of the capital.

A family friend, quoting relatives in Europe, told AFP on Friday that Barzan was killed that same day at the Ramadi farm in a US airstrike.

Cricket

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Smith. With both India and South Africa having led behind some of their key players for the Dhaka event, the game will provide an opportunity for the younger members to grab the spotlight.

It was however unfortunate that the two giants could not meet on equal terms in the World Cup after South Africa bowled out at the preliminary stage.

India are expected to make no changes to the side that played against Bangladesh. South Africa on the other hand has limited options to choose from as it is.

The South Africans warmed up for the big match with a convincing 127-run victory against the BCB Eleven at the BKSP in Savar on Friday.

Yesterday the Proteas had a good workout under lights at the match venue while India opted not to train outdoors.

Iraq invasion protested

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sions of different organisations began to assemble from different parts with colourful banners, placards and effigies of Bush and Blair. The demonstration ran till 6:00 pm.

The placards said 'Stop Genocide in Iraq', 'No More Blood for Oil', 'We Want Peace'.

The protesters also burnt logos of CNN and BBC, two international news media, for their misleading and biased news coverage.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) brought out a procession from its party office at Naya Paltan while Jamaat-e-Islami held a rally at the north gate of Baitul Mokarram Mosque.

Opposition Awami League held a peace rally at Bangabandhu Avenue. Left leaning parties, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Socialist Party of Bangladesh, Four Left parties and Jatiya Samjantrik Dal (JSD) demonstrated at

the Paltan intersection.

Among various organisations were the Engineers' Institute of Bangladesh, Institute of Diploma Engineers, Sammilito Ainjibi Samannoy Parishad, Oikya Prochesta, Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association, National Press Club, Sammilito Sangskritik Jote, Development Centre International, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA).

Then there also were the Jatiya Gono Protirodh Andolon, Sylhet Bibhag Unnoyon Sangram Parishad, Khelafat Andolon, Ganotantrik Majdur Party, Bangladesh Krishok Sramik Mukti Andolon, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Chhatra Majlish, Communist Union, World People's Resistance Movement, Bangladesh Human Rights Monitoring and Development Organisation, Citizens' Society Against Imperialism-Aggression and Looting.

Activists of Tahfiz-e-Din Islam Sangstha, a pro Islamic organisation, brought out a procession with swords.

A large number of police was deployed at the different points and in front of various multinational companies and banks to avoid untoward incidents.

The areas were clogged with traffic jam for several hours as the protesters occupied the major streets in the city.

Water crisis

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table that would partially solve the crisis.

It is also sinking pipes lower into the ground to extract water.

In Mirpur, the WASA is installing two deep tubewells, which officials hope would solve the crisis in the area.

The authorities have also requested the government to deploy army in pump houses for proper handling of pumps this summer.

Bush: Shut borders

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said Bush.

Syria "just needs to know we expect full cooperation," he said.

Syria has told the United States it has closed its border with Iraq to all but humanitarian traffic, US officials said Thursday, as they stepped up warnings to Damascus not to assist the remnants of Saddam's collapsed regime.

"We certainly hope that proves to be true," US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

The US ambassador to Syria, Theodore Khattouf, had been told of the closure in meetings with Syrian officials in Damascus, but stressed that Washington would be watching the border closely to see if the move was enforced, the State Department said.

Boucher said the US military and intelligence agencies would be monitoring the frontier "quite closely," and he repeated warnings issued over the past few days by senior US officials that Syria faced a critical choice in its dealings with Iraq.

"Syria has choice to make and we hope Syria makes the right one," Boucher told reporters.

A senior State Department official said later it was possible that Damascus's definition of "humanitarian traffic" might well be different than Washington's.

Meanwhile, Syria's ambassador to Washington said the accusations amounted to a US-Israeli campaign against Damascus.

Rostom Zohbi told Arab satellite television Al-Jazeera that US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had accused Syria on March 28 of sending military aid to Iraq in its war with the US-led coalition, notably night-vision goggles.

"This came as no surprise. On the same day, I read the same accusations in (the Israeli newspaper) Haaretz, just hours before Mr Rumsfeld made his statement," Zohbi noted.

The Washington Times, citing US officials, yesterday said that some of

Iraq's top weapons specialists have fled to Syria.

Among those believed to have reached Damascus are Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash and Rihab Taha, two top scientists in Iraq's biological-weapons programme.

The two have been nicknamed "Mrs Anthrax" and "Doctor Germ", respectively, in US media and intelligence circles.

Ammash was listed by US Central Command yesterday as one of 55 most-wanted Iraqis. US officials say Taha, a British-trained microbiologist, led Iraq's drive to weaponise deadly anthrax.

Both are senior members of the Baath party -- an attainment unusual for Iraqi women.

Intelligence reports show that some Iraqi weapons scientists may seek political refuge in France, an administration official told the daily, speaking under cover of anonymity.

Saddam adviser

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Hussein was. He also insisted Iraq did not possess chemical or biological weapons and denied being a member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

He told ZDF he had stayed at home even after US forces arrived in Baghdad. He said he felt in no way guilty and had therefore voluntarily surrendered to US forces.

The United States is planning to issue decks of playing cards to its troops depicting the 55 most wanted leadership figures. Al-Saadi, number 55, appears on the seven of diamonds card.

Many Iraqi ambassadors around the world would accept the arrival of a US-appointed administrator in Baghdad, Iraq's ambassador to Greece said in an interview published by the pro-government daily To Vima yesterday.

"I want the pillaging to stop and for security and stability to return to Iraq... even if this is achieved by (US retired general Jay) Garner," Farouk El Fytan said, referring to the man Washington has named as the interim administrator for Iraq.

"It is in the interests of the Iraqi people for American soldiers to intervene and put an end to the destruction," he continued, adding that many of his counterparts agreed with him.

Mohammad Aldouri, Iraq's ambassador to the United Nations, stopped over in Paris yesterday en route to the Middle East, after stating his hopes for a new relationship between Iraq and the United States.

BTTB

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confusion, whether or not I will receive a call," said a mobile phone user.

The BTTB officials said software and necessary hardware have to be installed in telephone exchanges and subscribers will have to have a CLIP display set to enjoy the facility. A low range set with CLIP facility with a 200-number memory costs Tk 800 while a high-tech set costs more than Tk 2,000.

The BTTB presently provides CLIP for mobile phones with BTTB connectivity. It can also extend CLIP facility to districts, the official said.

Probe into head injury

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his alleged involvement in the incident, is being interrogated by senior police officials at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

Meanwhile, police picked up sex workers Liza, Meghla and Lucky from Sangsad Bhavan area and were interrogating them at the DB headquarters. A Mishuk driver is also being interrogated as an eyewitness.

Tejgaon police earlier said they picked up Awal at about 7 pm on Thursday when he was taking to some women, suspected to be gay girls.

While being taken to the police station, he jumped from the vehicle to flee and was injured in the head, they claimed.

The army brushed aside the claim, saying Awal was injured in police torture.

In the case filed with Tejgaon police station on Friday night, Lt Col Zahedur Rahman said that the OC (of Tejgaon thana) picked up Awal and took him to the police station.

Awal was beaten with blunt weapons and there were marks of severe injuries on his head. "There is no injury marks in other parts of his body which means he did not jump from the police van", he said in the FIR.

In the FIR it was also stated that the incident was an act of "revenge" on

some policemen were "manhandled" during the army-led Clean Hear Operation.

He said police picked up Awal while he was returning from patrol duty in an army jeep.

On Friday night, some army personnel went to Tejgaon police station on information and found Awal lying on the floor. They took him to the CMH with severe head injuries. Doctors later said he was 'clinically dead'.

Some top police officials also rushed to Tejgaon police station late Friday night and interrogated the OC.

Sources said the OC, his bodyguard Constable Ataur and driver Constable Faruk could be arrested if Awal dies.

Indemnity act

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this morning when Attorney General AF Hassan Arif is likely to submit his views opposing the writ.

The indemnity act was challenged after six weeks of its enactment by parliament providing for immunity to the joint forces from trial in civil court.

Chief of Army Staff, officer-in-charge of the operation Major Kabir, Inspector General of Police and OC of Savar police station have been made respondents.

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and emerged with bookshelves, sofas and computers.

Much of the looting in Baghdad and other cities has targeted government ministries and the homes of former regime leaders, but looters also have ransacked embassies, stolen ambulances from hospitals and robbed some private businesses.

Also looted was the Iraq National Museum, the country's flagship archaeological museum, which featured priceless artifacts dating back to 5,000 B.C.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld acknowledged that US troops had an obligation to help provide security but insisted that the extent of the chaos had been exaggerated.

US forces said their first priority would be rooting out remaining resistance but said they had begun patrols in Baghdad on Friday night.

More US troops were going into Baghdad and other cities around the country every day and curfews had been proposed, Rumsfeld said.

AFP reporters watched people converge on the Palestine Hotel where US officers and media are housed after foreign radio stations broadcast a US call for people to come forward.

Among them was a group of seven police officers.

Humanitarian officials have warned that widespread disorder in Iraqi cities threatens to snarl delivery of badly needed aid, while the Red Cross said Baghdad's medical system had all but collapsed due to combat damage, looting and fear of anarchy.

US forces took control of a security stronghold in the west of the city early, where militia and foreign volunteers from across the Arab world had been holding out.

Hundreds of Iraqis volunteered yesterday to help restore order in Baghdad after three days of heavy looting with rampaging mobs running wild.

The volunteers, including police officers, were responding to an urgent US appeal to help restore order and services to the capital, shattered and lawless after three weeks of heavy bombing and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Complaint Of Cluster Bombs

In another Baghdad neighbourhood, residents complained that US soldiers thus far have not heeded requests to clear cluster bombs dropped during the war. The residents said three people had been killed and one injured trying to pick up the unexploded ordnance.

Najah Jaffar, 51, described his attempt to get American help removing the bombs.

"When I spoke to the soldier, he said, 'It takes time. I think many people will be injured. Many bodies, many children will be killed without reason,'" Jaffar said. "This is no peace."

Arms Cache

In Baghdad, US marines showed reporters a cache of about 50 explosives-laden suicide bomb vests in an elementary school less than 20 feet from the nearest home.

At a nearby junior high school, seven classrooms were filled with hundreds of crates of grenade launchers, surface-to-air missiles and ammunition. Residents said Iraqi soldiers and militiamen had positioned weaponry throughout the neighbourhood before US forces moved in.

Busload Of Suspected Killers

In western Iraq, US forces stopped a busload of men who had US\$650,000 in cash and a letter offering rewards for killing American soldiers.

Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, at US Central Command, said the 59 men, all of military age, were captured while heading toward Iraq's border with Syria. He said he did not know the men's nationalities nor who wrote the letter offering rewards.

"We didn't imagine this much stuff here," said Lt. David Wright, of Goldsboro, N.C. "Every 200 metres we find something."

Searching for weapons, and for

holdout bands of pro-Saddam fighters, has been the primary task of many of the American troops in Baghdad.

Appeal For Order

Aid organisations, as well as many Baghdad residents, have pleaded with US officials to crack down on the looting.

Meanwhile, the State Department said it is sending 26 police and judicial officers to Iraq, the first component of a team that will eventually number about 1,200. The officers will be part of a group led by Jay Garner, the retired general chosen by the Bush administration to run the initial Iraqi civil administration under American occupation.

"The humanitarian situation is worsening as a consequence of widespread lawlessness," said InterAction, a Washington-based coalition of more than 160 US aid groups.

Iraq-based relief workers with CARE reported that hospitals are "in absolutely dire straits," with some looted and others closed to prevent looting.

Control Of Crossings

In western Iraq, US troops seized control of crossings on two highways leading into Syria. There was tough resistance near Qaim, on the Syrian border, raising speculation that the town might be site for illegal weapons.

Fire fighting deal

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In a March 26 letter to Flowers, Waxman singled out the contract to Kellogg Brown & Root for having "no set time limit and no dollar limit and is apparently structured in such a way as to encourage the contract to increase its costs and, consequently, the costs to the taxpayer."

Flowers wrote that the \$7 billion ceiling reflected the difficulty in predicting the extent of the damage to Iraqi wells and stressed that the actual value of the deal will depend on the cost of the orders placed under it. Awarding the contract, he wrote, "was justified and approved under laws providing exceptions to full and open competition."

By 2010, Iraq is expected to have the capacity to produce 3.8 million barrels of oil per day compared with Kuwait's 3.5 million barrels, up from the 2.2 million barrels and 1.7 million barrels the two countries could produce respectively on the eve of Iraq's invasion of its neighbour.

In a related move, Senator Susan Collins, a Maine Republican and chairwoman of the Governmental Affairs Committee, introduced a bill to require USAID to explain publicly how it is issuing contracts for postwar rebuilding work, which she said could be worth as much as \$100 billion.

"I am concerned that, right off the bat, USAID is limiting competition,"

Collins said. "Fair and full competition would ensure the best value for American taxpayers."

Collins was joined in introducing the "Sunshine in Iraq Reconstruction Contracting Act of 2003" by Senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut, the ranking Democrat on her committee, along with Democratic senators Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, Ronald L. Wyden of Oregon, and Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia.

Halliburton operates in Bangladesh as a development partner of Shell Oil in the Sangu gas field.

Mayors

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and LGRD Minister in this regard.

Kamran further said he wants to keep the Sylhet City Corporation neutral and carry out development work involving all commissioners and others concerned.

Mojibur Rahman Sarwar MP also expressed his joy saying that he felt proud of taking oath as the first Mayor of Barisal by the Prime Minister.

Replying to a question, the Barisal Mayor and BNP lawmaker said his first priority would be to make Barisal a drug-free city.

The oath taking ceremony was conducted by Local Government Secretary AYBI Siddiqi.

PHOTO: STAR