

Sundarbans not Shell's target

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shell Oil has no plan to conduct any geological survey in the Sundarbans because of environmental sensitivity in the World Heritage Site as well as lack of energy potentials there.

"We have not done anything in the Sundarbans and we will not do anything there," said Shell Oil Director Siraj-ud-dowlah yesterday.

Petrobangla sources also confirmed that the Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell did not even submit any plan to begin survey in the world's biggest mangrove forest that falls under the country's oil and gas exploration block 5.

Shell Oil is learnt to begin seismic survey in the Barisal region under block 10 from December.

"Block 10 is highly prospective for natural resources. So, why should Shell go for block 5 now?" asked back a Petrobangla source, ruling out any possibility of undertaking seismic survey in the Sundarbans.

The government contracts are attached with special clauses that bar aggressive exploration in the forests spread over 6,017 square kilometres, he said.

Even if Shell decided to begin survey in the Sundarbans, it is contractually bound to conduct aerodynamic survey using helicopters and aircraft. Shell signed the production sharing contracts (PSCs) for blocks 5 and 10 in July 2001.

The major part of block 5 is dominated by the Sundarbans while a negligible part of the forest falls under block 10.

The contracts allow Shell to conduct seismic surveys on 1000-km area in blocks 5 and 10 and drill two exploratory wells in each of the two blocks in five years.

Explorers use explosives to study geological structures in the seismic

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

290-km Dhaka roads to be dug up in monsoon

PINAKI ROY

It's monsoon and four utility service providers are going to dig up 290 kilometres of the capital's roads, which many fear would create havoc on commuters.

Titas Gas, BTTB, WASA and DESA have sought permission from the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to dig roads at more than 100 points in and around the city.

Already, city roads have been dug at 43 points, most of which are left un-carpeted.

Titas has asked for permission to dig 146 kilometres, BTTB 135 kilometres, WASA one kilometre and DESA eight kilometres to lay pipes, DCC Public Relation Officer Abdur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said permission to dig roads would soon be given to those organisations through the DCC's newly set up one-stop service cell to coordinate road development works.

DCC sources said they have already given permission to dig roads at 114 points to four utility service providers this year.

But it has been found that water-logging, following heavy rain, has stopped work at most of the points, disrupting movement of pedestrians and commuters.

Road-digging is going on despite DCC officials and the mayor himself

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR
 Road digging goes unabated even during the monsoon and more diggings are in the offing with four utility service providers seeking permission to go into the act. Bhooteer Goli, as this picture shows, is one of the worst places to visit now.

AL enforces 8-hr hartal tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) will enforce a countrywide eight-hour hartal tomorrow to protest insecurity in public life.

The shutdown from 6:00am to 2:00pm coincides with the build-up to tabling of the national budget in parliament that will resume its session at 3:00pm Thursday.

The decision on hartal came at a joint meeting of the AL presidium and the AL secretariat at the party's Dhanmondi office last night, with Acting President of the AL Zillur Rahman in the chair.

The call for hartal has nothing to do with the 2003-04 budget, AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night. "That's (budget) a separate issue. We don't want to prejudice anything. We may opt for another programme later."

The hartal came on the heels of the recent killing of its former lawmaker and Natore district unit leader Mamtaz Uddin and attacks on former whip and party lawmaker Mujibul Haq in Comilla.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Market raid suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BDR-led taskforce drive in city markets was suspended yesterday following a meeting between the home minister and leaders of different shop owners' and jewellers' associations.

Home Minister Ataf Hossain Chowdhury also assured them of handing over the seized clothes, excepting cotton ones, and gold within seven days provided they produced valid documents, meeting sources said.

During the two-day raid at different city markets that began on Sunday, the taskforce seized clothes worth around Tk 5 crore and gold weighing 202 Tola.

Treasurer of the Bangladesh Jewellers' Association (BJA) Enamul Haq Dolon told The Daily Star that the home minister admitted that the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Yet another robbery in guise of tenants

STAFF CORESPONDENT

Yet again robbers, in the guise of tenants, reportedly looted Tk 10 lakh in cash and gold ornaments from a house at Dhalpur in Demra yesterday.

Pretending as prospective tenants, a gang of seven went to the residence of Motaleb Sikder, a car businessman, at around 1:00pm.

According to the victims, the gang tied up the inmates and took away Tk 10 lakh and some gold ornaments.

Motaleb was away during the incident.

Family members said they had drawn the cash from a bank on Monday to purchase land.

The duty officer at the Demra Police Station said no case was filed till last night.

On Monday, robbers, also in the guise of tenants, looted cash, gold ornaments and other valuables said to be worth over Tk 4.5 lakh from a residence at Monipuripara, Tejgaon.

Revenue expenditure set to go up in next budget

Tk 300cr agriculture subsidy, Tk 1,000cr golden handshake allocation planned

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Revenue budget -- both the revised one for this fiscal and the original one for the next fiscal -- may see an increase when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman places the budget documents tomorrow before the parliament.

The budget for the next fiscal may see a 17 per cent rise in revenue expenditure from this fiscal's. The revised outlay for this fiscal may also be raised by 10 per cent, according to finance ministry sources.

This will be the first budget under the framework of the three-year poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). For the first time too, the budget will give a rough estimate of what would be the income and the expenditure targets for two more

years -- FY05 and FY06.

The revenue budget was cut down to Tk 22,692 crore in last fiscal from Tk 23,107 crore -- the first time anything of this sort happened. But this fiscal's revenue outlay may be revised upward to around Tk 26,500 crore from the original Tk 23,972 crore. The next fiscal's revenue expenditure will be set at slightly above Tk 28,000, sources said.

The revised current budget got inflated because of an increase in debt servicing and demand for funds from different ministries.

On the other hand, revenue earning for the next fiscal has been estimated at around Tk 36,000 crore.

This fiscal's revenue earning was set at Tk 33,084 crore which includes Tk 23,750 crore by the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

The new budget is likely to see a 15 per cent increase in NBR collection. But the non-NBR revenue target for the next budget may be set lower than this fiscal's 7,584 crore. This is because this fiscal's target remains unachieved.

The budget deficit in the next budget may be between 4.5 per cent and 5 per cent, which will be mostly financed from foreign assistance and reliance on domestic borrowing will be kept to the minimum.

Borrowing from the banking system this fiscal was estimated at Tk 1,358 crore. Till March, the government did not have to go for any borrowing, rather it retarded Tk 306 crore in loans. However, it had taken Tk 3,254 crore in net loans through selling of savings instruments.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

BNP faces discontent as parliamentary practices elude party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP lawmakers are getting increasingly frustrated with the lack of parliamentary practices within the party.

Many ruling party legislators are unhappy over the fact that no parliamentary party meeting was held in about a year and that the parliament is functioning virtually without standing committees.

Party sources said the parliamentary party met only twice -- once to elect the parliamentary party leader after the October 1, 2001 general election and then on June 19-20, 2002 to bring a no-confidence motion against the then president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Since then it has not met although the parliament went into its eighth session yesterday.

A number of senior BNP leaders said the parliament is becoming as

good as ineffective and its sessions are held merely to meet constitutional obligations.

They pointed out the constitution requires the parliament to form 50 standing committees -- 39 on ministries and 11 on parliamentary affairs -- immediately after its formation. But the parliament has formed only 16 such bodies, 11 of those in its seventh session.

"I think securing over two-thirds seats in the parliament is meaningless if we fail to constitute the standing committees and hold our parliamentary party meetings. I do not understand what prevents us from doing these," said an influential BNP leader, seeking anonymity.

Sources said the MPs do not want to speak out for fear of breaking parliamentary party discipline. But resentment is growing among them because they have no scope

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Budget session begins as AL stays out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad began last night with main opposition Awami League (AL) staying away from it.

The brief inaugural sitting of the eighth session of the parliament was adjourned at 8:05pm, following adoption of an obituary reference on the deaths of an MP of the ruling party, three other former lawmakers and an advisor to the caretaker government.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, who chaired the session that began 10 minutes behind the 7:00pm schedule, kept other business of the day in abeyance after the adoption of the obituary reference and holding of a commemorative discussion on late MP Nurul Amin Talukdar.

There will be no sitting of the parliament today. Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman will present the national budget for the 2003-04 fiscal when the session

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Former AL whip badly mauled in armed attack

Strike in Comilla today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Advocate Mujibul Haq, former whip and organising secretary of the Comilla district Awami League, was seriously injured in an attack by armed miscreants yesterday.

He was admitted to Sikder Medical College Hospital at Dhaka with grievous eye injury.

The district unit of the AL called a half-day strike today in the town to protest the attack on Haq.

Though the local AL blamed the ruling party for the attack, reports indicate that the attack might have been the result of intra-party squabbles.

Sources said Haq came under attack when he was returning to his home in the town from his chamber at 12:00 on Tuesday night. When his rickshaw reached the Farida Biddayatana (a local school), two armed men intercepted the rickshaw and beat him up severely.

Haq sustained injuries in the head, left eye, and mouth.

He was admitted to a local medical centre and later shifted to Sikder

Medical College Hospital at Dhaka.

Haq said he could not identify the attackers on the dark rainy night.

Local AL leaders and activists were agitated when the news of the attack spread in the town.

The district AL organised protest meeting yesterday afternoon in front of its office premises.

Presided over by Professor Md. Khorshed Alam, president of district AL, it was addressed among others by Professor Abdur Rouf, former general secretary Advocate Afzal Khan, General Secretary ATM Mahbubur Rahman and Alhaj Omar Faruque.

The speakers demanded immediate arrest of the attackers. Later, the leaders of the AL, Jubo League and Bangladesh Chhatra League, Comilla unit, brought out a procession, which paraded different roads in the town.

Though no case was filed till writing of this report at 7:00pm yesterday, a general dairy was filed with the Kotwali Police Station in this connection.

JS officials, secys to MPs keep defaulting on phone bills

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Twenty-six officials of the parliament and private secretaries to lawmakers are still to clear their dues in home telephone bills despite as many as eight reminders, sources said.

These officials include personal secretaries and assistant private secretary to the speaker, deputy speaker, leader of the opposition, whips and other officials.

The parliament secretariat attempted to collect the arrears by serving repeated notices on them but gave up in January this year.

Now that there has been no action on the part of the authorities,

the defaulters continue to use their phones at will.

As per rule, personal secretaries of the speaker and whips are entitled to a monthly telephone allowance of Tk 1,294 and senior assistant secretaries, assistant secretaries, and section officers Tk 949. The officer concerned has to pay the extra sum for bills coming higher.

One of the defaulters, Assistant Personal Secretary to the Speaker Md Khalekuzzaman has Tk 1,032 in outstanding bills for five months. He was served with five notices. Assistant Private Secretary (political) to the Speaker MA Majid has Tk 6,852 pending for six months and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7