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Chevron-Texaco pulls out, too

SHARIER KHAN

After Shell Oil, American oil giant Chevron-Texaco is now winding up business from Bangladesh.

Chevron's regional managing director made the announcement on his arrival in the city yesterday. He met Petrobangla Chairman SR Osmani and handed him a letter stating that all shares of Chevron-Texaco in the Block 9 production sharing contract (PSC) have been sold out to Niko Resources, a Canadian oil company, sources said.

Niko Resources participated in the second round block bidding for

oil and gas exploration but was disqualified on both financial and technical grounds.

The Chevron regional MD explained the pullout was decided as part of the Chevron-Texaco's global restructuring plan. "He said they are trimming down their operations where market prospect is bleak," a source quoting the Chevron executive said.

The Chevron official added red tape and overall poor governance have also discouraged the US company.

Only last month, Shell Oil announced its departure from

Bangladesh, saying it was streamlining operations in countries with small energy market.

A top Petrobangla official meanwhile said the change of shares to a company with such credentials will be scrutinised in legal perspectives.

"The PSC clause does permit Chevron-Texaco to sell its shares to another party. But the government also has the right to judge whether the new company is qualified for this operation," he said.

"And this unilateral decision will now be scrutinised by legal experts before we accept the sellout."

But a legal scrutiny could not

block any such move in the past. Oil companies can sell their shares to anyone they want due to loopholes in the PSCs, the official admitted.

In the PSC for Block 9, Chevron-Texaco held 60 per cent share, Irish company Tullow 30 per cent as the operator and Bangladeshi company Bapex 10 per cent share without any investment.

Niko will now carry out the responsibilities of Chevron-Texaco alongside Tullow. The oil companies have plans to begin drilling of an exploratory well in Kashimpur near Comilla in November.

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Edn ministry in holiday mood

STAR REPORT

The education ministry has been in a holiday mood since Monday, as the minister, state minister and education secretary went abroad.

Moreover, the chairman of Dhaka education board, who is also the director general of secondary and higher secondary education, is out of the country.

According to the government directive, the minister and the secretary cannot leave the country at a time.

Education Minister Osman Farruk left Monday for Indonesian capital Jakarta for lobbying in favour of Bangladesh's candidate for OIC secretary general.

The minister will later go to Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur and is expected to return home next week.

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US blocks UN bid to shield Arafat

REUTERS, United Nations

The United States Tuesday killed a UN Security Council resolution seeking to protect Palestinian President Yasser Arafat from an Israeli threat to "remove" him.

Eleven Security Council members voted in favour of the draft while Britain, Germany and Bulgaria abstained after hours of consultations failed to lead to a compromise acceptable to both the United States and Syria, the resolution's sponsor.

The measure, drafted by Palestinian UN envoy Nasser al-Kidwa with the support of Arab governments, demanded that "Israel, the occupying power, desist from any act of deportation and

cease any threat to the safety of the elected president of the Palestinian Authority."

It also called for "the complete cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction" and called for increased efforts to implement the international road map for Middle East peace.

After back-to-back suicide bombings killed 15 Israelis, Israel last week announced a decision "to remove" Arafat as "an obstacle to peace," although it did not say how or when.

During nearly eight hours of harsh debate in the 15-nation Security Council on Monday, more than 40 governments condemned the decision in principle to get rid of Arafat.

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Yasser Arafat



Clockwise from left: People suffer burning sensation in their eyes from emissions of toxic gas from a tanker that was broken open in Sitakunda on Monday; the environmental pollution also killed chickens and damaged banana plants.



Sitakunda still in toxic gas fallout

ABDULLAH-AL MAHMUD, back from Sitakunda, Ctg

Neglect of monitoring by the authorities and non-removal of hazardous waste are blamed for a gush of highly toxic gas during the scraping of a tanker in Sitakunda, which polluted the environment and caused harm to human, animal and plant lives.

The gas spewing from a shipbreaking yard, Ahmed Mostafa Steel Shipyard, left a dreadful impact on a one-kilometre swathe of Jahanabad at Kadam Rasul in the coastal Sitakunda upazila on Monday.

A haze clouded the whole area like mist and skin broke up in blisters, said a young shopkeeper.

Under the influence of the gas emission, farm-raised chickens continued to die until yesterday.

The gas scorched hyacinth, banana and other plants and caused respiratory problems and burning sensation to skin and eyes of people, especially children.

Abul Kalam Sawdagor appeared at the shipbreaking yard with dead chickens.

Kalam told The Daily Star, "I had around 4,000 chickens in my poultry farm. Of them, over 1,200 have died from toxic gas."

"I have spent over Tk 4,000 on medicine for them," he said, adding he wanted to show the dead chickens to the contractor who was breaking the tanker.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Over 100 hurt as train derails in Chuadanga

UNB, Chuadanga

More than 100 passengers were injured, five of them critically, when four bogies of an inter-city train from Khulna derailed near Ghoramara Bridge here yesterday.

Railway officials and witnesses said the bogies of Syedpur-bound inter-city train, Rupsha, went off the track six minutes after it had departed from Chuadanga Railway Station at 11:30am.

Three of the bogies overturned while another tumbled into a ditch, disrupting train communications on Khulna-Ishwardi, Khulna-Goalondo and Darsana-Goalondo routes.

High officials from Paksey Railway Station visited the spot and suspected that faults in the track

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5,000 trucks stuck at Paksey ghat, fresh lowlands swamped

STAR REPORT

About 5,000 trucks remained stranded at Paksey ferry ghat for the fifth day yesterday, as all the ferries became inoperative because of the cascade of floodwaters down the Padma that also swamped lowlands in 12 districts and killed three people.

The queues of trucks, laden mostly with perishable vegetables, stretched over six kilometres on both sides and continued to grow by the hour due to the break in ferry communication.

Late monsoon cloudbursts and opening of all the floodgates of the

Farakka barrage upstream played havoc with the low-lying areas in Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Rajbari, Manikganj, Kushtia, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Magura, Munshiganj, Narayanganj and Dhaka districts.

The Padma floodwaters threatened a three-kilometre stretch of Rajshahi city protection dam between Bulonpur and Talaimari in Rajshahi city, forcing the authorities to place stone blocks and sandbags at the vulnerable points.

Our Rajshahi correspondent adds: Lowlands in 25 unions in six upazilas of Rajshahi and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

JS refuses to talk about US troops' immunity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday rejected proposals for discussion on the much-talked-about pact between Dhaka and Washington under which no US soldier and officer charged with criminal offences can be tried in Bangladesh.

Opposition Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shajahan Khan and Golam Mohammad Quader of Jatiya Party put separate adjournment motions for discussion on the pact in parliament.

The speaker rejected the two adjournment motions along with some others without explaining the

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Free trade now depends on Geneva meet

STAR REPORT

The future of global trade liberalisation after the collapse of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancun depends on the meeting in Geneva by December 15 this year, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said yesterday.

"Despite the failure in Cancun, the WTO still exists and negotiations will continue. We don't consider it as a big blow to the WTO," he told reporters at Zia International Airport after returning from the fifth WTO ministerial conference in the Mexican resort town.

The rigidity of rich nations to try to force poor nations to negotiate

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

River-link plan PM hopes India won't arbitrarily withdraw water

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is hopeful that India will not unilaterally withdraw water from the international rivers, which will cause great damage to the country's environment, agriculture, industries and overall ecology.

While responding to the queries from lawmakers during the prime minister's question time in parliament, she said Bangladesh had

conveyed its concern to India through diplomatic channel at the latter's river inter-linking project involving \$200 billion.

"Bangladesh is keeping a close watch on the developments and gathering information from various sources for scrutiny. A high-powered taskforce is engaged in reviewing the whole matter," she told the House.

Quoting experts, Khaleda Zia apprehended that if India went

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Ashulia land-filling SC extends its stay order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday extended its stay order till November 8 on the operation of a High Court (HC) Division injunction that barred Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha) from preventing real estate developer Jamuna Builders to land-fill Ashulia wetlands in Savar.

Justice Hamidul Haque of the Appellate Division granted the extension upon a government petition.

Jamuna obtained the order on August 24 to go ahead with the earth-filling despite a pending injunction issued by another HC bench on July 13, 2002 that had put on hold land-filling by anyone in Ashulia.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Dhaka-Yangon road works to start this year: Morshed

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan has said the construction of the proposed Bangladesh-Myanmar Highway through southeastern Chittagong over the Naaf river will start this year.

"Bangladesh wants to improve its cooperation with all countries in the region, including India, Myanmar, China, Bhutan and Nepal, for economic development", the foreign

minister told reporters at a get-together of Chittagong Journalists Forum, Dhaka, at the Padma state guesthouse yesterday.

He welcomed the Dhaka-Agartala bus service scheduled to be inaugurated tomorrow, which, he said, would strengthen the relations between the two next door neighbours.

The foreign minister stressed the need for modernising the Chittagong seaport for its optimum

utilisation and making Chittagong as the commercial capital.

Replying to a question on recent wave of killing and abduction in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, he said incidents of violence took place in the past too and it exists today.

Dismissing apprehension of any major violence over there, Khan quoted the UNDP resident representative as saying that the UNDP would move ahead with its development

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Tigers' chance to avoid whitewash

HASAN MASOOD from Rawalpindi

With the series already lost Bangladesh will go into the fourth match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium today knowing that they will have to beat Pakistan to avoid a

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