



# The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



REGD. NO. DA 784

VOL. XIII No. 305

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 22, 2003

COMMITTED TO People's Right to Know

AGRAHAYAN 8, 1410 BS

RAMADAN 26, 1424 HJRI

16 PAGES PRICE Tk 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

## Gas field for Niko flouting policy

SHARIF KHAN

Once financially and technically disqualified, Canadian company Niko Resources has suddenly become the government's eye candy in the gas sector.

Registered in Bermuda as Niko Exploration (Block 9) Ltd with an authorised capital of mere \$12,000, the company found its qualification suddenly shooting up thanks to its political connections with a certain Bhaban - the so-called alternative powerhouse of the government.

industry insiders said. Breaching its policy, the government last month secretly awarded the company an unexplored gas field, dubbed as marginal or used.

According to rules, any oil company seeking the exploration right to an unexplored field must qualify and win it through a competitive bidding.

Now, the company is going to get government clearance for taking over 60 percent stakes in gas exploration in block 9 from the US oil giant Chevron-Texaco.

When Chevron-Texaco under Chevron International Bangladesh Ltd (CIBL) announced on September 17 that it sold all its shares of the prized block, Petrobangla rejected the sale, as it did not comply with the contract.

According to available documents, the sale of shares between the two companies did not take place before September 23.

All previous sales of block shares, including the deals of Occidental and Unocal and Cairn and Shell, complied with the production

sharing contract (PSC) terms and conditions.

Even the sale of Shell stakes to Cairn in blocks 15 and 16, announced in August, is undergoing a prolonged legal process. Shell has not completed preparing all legal papers to file an application for share transfer approval from the government.

But amid pressure from political overlords, Petrobangla is now 'legally scrutinising' to see if the sale is okay, sources said.

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PHOTO: STAR

Devotees offer Friday prayers at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque during Jumatul Wida, the last Juma of Ramadan.

## Shab-e-Qadr tonight

UNB, Dhaka

Shab-e-Qadr will be observed across the country tonight, seeking blessings of the Almighty for peace and progress of Muslim Ummah.

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

The president in his message said the holy Quran started to be revealed to Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) at this night. And the night gives the Muslims scope for seeking mercy of the Almighty.

In her message, the prime minister prayed to Allah for overall welfare of the nation and Muslim Ummah.

Sheikh Hasina, in her message, greeted the countrymen as well as Muslim Ummah on the occasion of Shab-e-Qadr.

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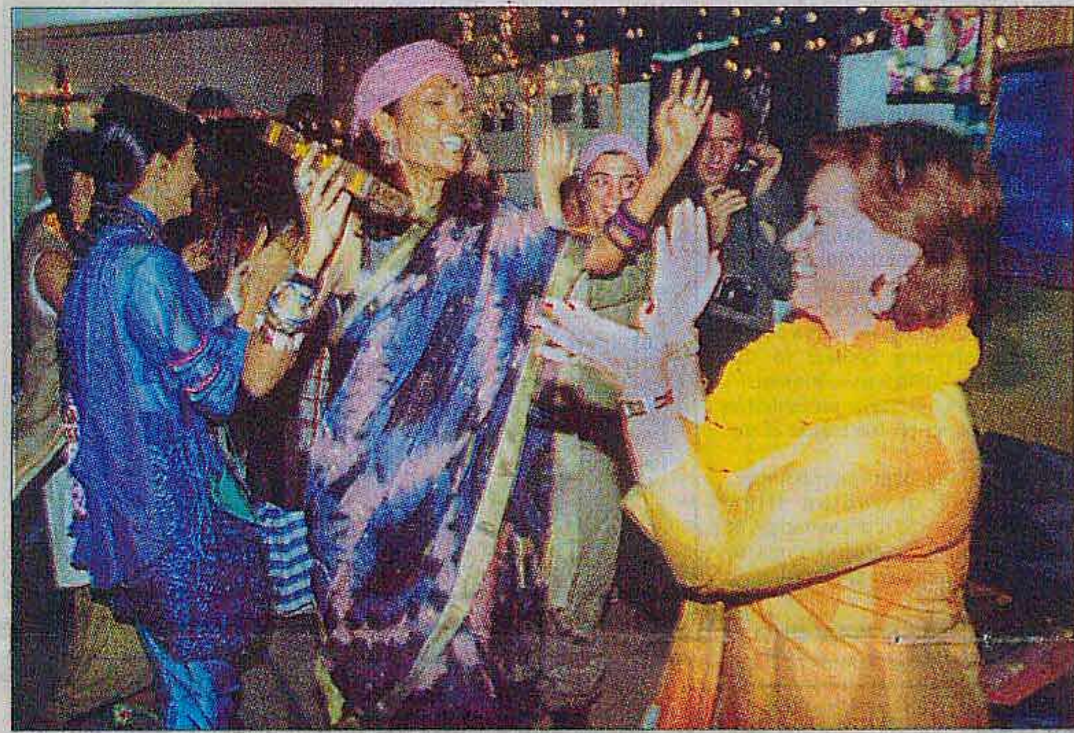


PHOTO: STAR

Grand Duchess of Luxembourg Maria Teresa (R), Unesco goodwill ambassador for education, dances to the music with internationally renowned fashion designer Bibi Russell (C) in Dhaka yesterday. Teresa is on a three-day visit to Bangladesh.

## Bid to 'capture' Ahmadia mosque turns violent

50 including 18 cops injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 50 people including 18 policemen were injured in twin attacks by anti-Ahmadia Muslims on law-enforcers near an Ahmadia mosque at Nakhhalpara in Tejgaon before and after the Juma prayers yesterday.

The mob snatched two police

motorbikes and set them ablaze at Mohakhali in the swell of violence stemming from disputes over offering of prayers at the mosque.

Police and witnesses said the incident ensued when some 500 anti-Ahmadia Muslims marched towards East Nakhhalpara Ahmadia Mosque shortly after noon for what they called freeing the mosque from

non-Muslims.

The bid to oust the Ahmadias from the mosque and capture it for 'real Muslims' was the second in 15 hours since the first such attack after Tarabi prayers Thursday night.

The marchers gathered at the Rahim Metal Mosque in Tejgaon to join a meeting there before Khatib

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## Jubo Dal leader shot dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jubo Dal leader and alleged member of the notorious 'Seven Star Group' was gunned down and a Jubo league leader was shot in the capital yesterday.

Newly elected Assistant Organising Secretary of Jubo Dal's north city unit Nurul Haq Nuru, 40, was shot as he came out of a mosque at Mirpur after Juma prayers.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

His relatives linked the killing to internal feuds of Jubo Dal or conflicts with a local Jubo League leader.

Witnesses and police said the incident took place in front of Baitul

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## Tangail AL leader gunned down: Hartal today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Unidentified assailants gunned down a district Awami League leader and a non-governmental organisation (NGO) executive at Collegepara last night.

The AL called a dawn to dusk hartal in the town today in protest of the killing.

Aminur Rahman Khan Bappi, 37, candidate for the AL district secretary, along with his friend and executive of an NGO Motiar Rahman Moti, 45, was coming out of his house to say tarabi prayers.

The assailants opened fire on

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## Mahi to set up 'school of democracy', train activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahi B Chowdhury, son of former president Badruddoza Chowdhury, yesterday unveiled a series of programmes to create awareness about crimes and corruption in an effort to present a better future to the new generation.

Mahi, also a ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) legislator, revealed his political plans amid flying speculations about the emergence of a third political force under his father.

The plans include creation of a

school of democracy and nationalism and production of special television programmes against criminal and corrupt practices in society.

Mahi announced the programmes at a press briefing at Purbani Hotel on the sidelines of an iftar party hosted by BNP's associate organisation -- Aamra Zia Hobo -- under strong intelligence watch. Mahi is the president of the organisation founded in 1996.

Police, both in uniform and plainclothes, were posted in and outside the hotel who used a video

camera to film all guests, including journalists.

The iftar party was held just a day ahead of the much-talked-about iftar party his father will host at Hotel Sheraton today.

The young deputy hosted another iftar on Thursday where he expressed dismay at state-run Bangladesh Television's suspension of the programmes made by his production house -- Entertainment Republic.

Frontline BNP leaders including BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, First Joint

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## B Chy hosts iftar today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury is hosting his much talked-about iftar party at Hotel Sheraton today amid flying speculations of the emergence of a third political force under him.

Sources close to Chowdhury said he booked a room at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel last night and was likely to check in after Sehri early this morning.

The list of 150 invitees includes journalists, cultural activists, former presidents and other members of the civil society.

They said political leaders were not included on the list because of strong intelligence watch.

The iftar party comes just a day

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## Jubo League leader, 5 family members burnt in arson

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A local Jubo League leader and at least five of his family members suffered serious burn injuries after alleged cadres of the JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal) set fire to his house at Rajpasha of Shakherhat union under Jhalakathi district in the early hours of yesterday.

Shakherhat union Jubo League President Saidur Rahman Khan Swapan, 35, who was taken to hospital in a critical condition, said the arson attack was apparently carried out as a sequel to his enmity with the

local BNP.

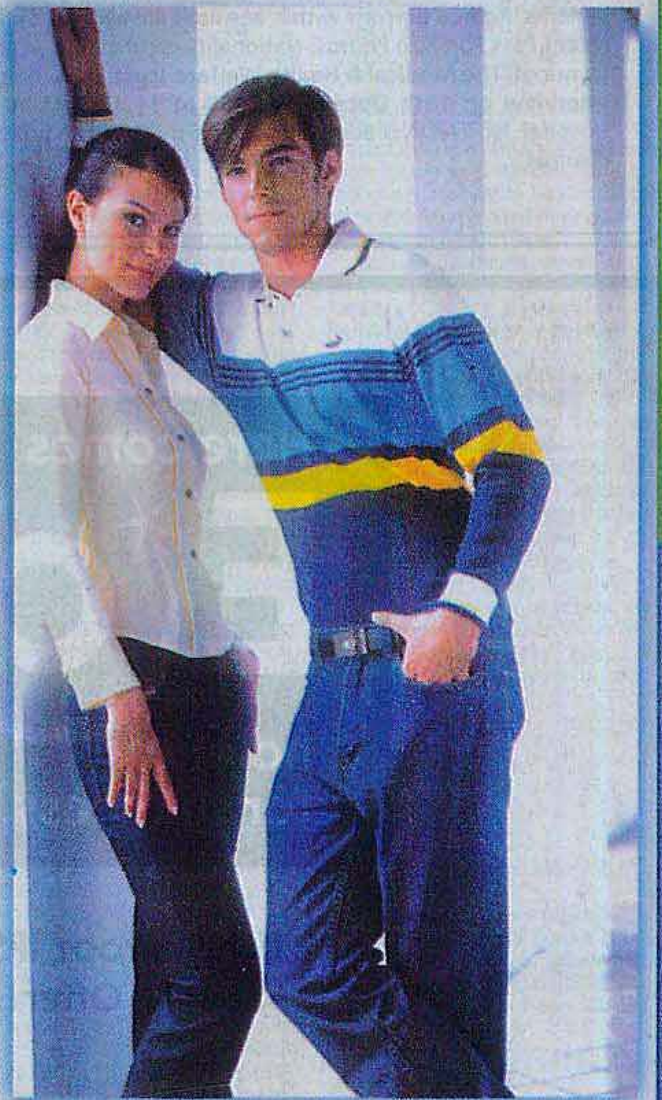
Swapan's mother Rowshan Ara alias Rani Begum, 65, wife Rehana Begum, 30, son Fahad, 5, sister Chhabi Begum, 25, and her son Maruf, 4, are also under treatment at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Condition of Rani and Fahad is serious, doctors said.

Police quoting eyewitnesses said the attackers cordoned off the house, locked its doors from outside and poured gasoline all over it before setting it on fire.

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## TOUGH GUYS DRESS EASY



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Controversy bubbles over Banskhal bloodbath. Pictures of three sisters, left to right, Babuti Shushil, Prashadi Shushil and Annie Shushil who were burnt alive apparently by robbers in Wednesday's bloodiest ever incineration on the Banskhal coast, about 30 miles off Chittagong city. Controversy surfaced over Wednesday's massacre in which 11 people of a Hindu family were burnt alive on the Banskhal coast, with law enforcers trying to describe it as just another robbery but locals too shocked to believe the police claim. Police arrested four suspects in a dragnet until last night but could not nab any of the robbers the law enforcers blamed for attacking the family and leaving Bimalendra Shushil to live out the grim reality of losing most of his loved ones. "We don't need financial help. What we have lost cannot be compensated. We want justice," Sunil Kanti Shushil, the eldest son of slain Tejendra Shushil, who flew home from Oman, told Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, who visited the scene yesterday. Chittagong Superintendent of Police Mahabubur Rahman stayed overnight in Banskhal, about 30 miles off Chittagong city, and led a series of raids on dens of robbers in the forest-rimmed areas, but his forces came back empty-handed. Investigators failed too: they vainly quizzed the arrestees to find leads to the incident. The grim scenes evolving from the grisly carnage in the outlying coastal village of Sadhanpur Shipara ended with the cremation of the charred bodies shortly before yesterday noon. A police camp was set up in the village to maintain law and order and bring a sense of security to the locals, jolted awake to the horror of what intelligence agencies called the bloodiest ever incineration in

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