

Petrobangla's Tk 38,325 crore unrealised for audit objections

SHAKHAWAT LITON

When the country is unable to explore gas on its own for fund crisis, Tk 38,325 crore of Petrobangla remains outstanding because of 3,660 long unresolved audit objections.

An objection to Magurchhara gas field blowout alone has stalled Tk 30,000 crore, said a Petrobangla report submitted to a meeting of the parliamentary standing com-

mittee on the energy and mineral resources ministry yesterday.

The Magurchhara gas field exploded in 1997 because of neglect of operation by US oil company Occidental, damaging a gas structure with an estimated 400 billion cubic feet of gas (BCF).

Petrobangla demanded the amount from Occidental, but the government allowed the company to sell its concerns to Unocal,

another US company, and safely leave Bangladesh.

Other objections include outstanding gas bills amounting to Tk 4,115 crore of the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd., where a section of politically sheltered meter readers and officials are involved in bill pilferage.

There are also audit objections involving Tk 114 crore to foreign

goods purchase and another Tk 331 crore to investment in various Petrobangla companies.

The committee will discuss the objections at its next meeting and recommend steps to realise the money as much as possible.

"A large amount of money is needed to develop the gas sector, so we will try to recover money resolving

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WORLD AIDS DAY

136 HIV positives added to country list this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the newly identified 136 HIV positive individuals this year, the country is going to observe the World AIDS Day today.

The number of HIV infected patients rose to 384 since 1989. It was 248 last year, according to virology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

About 13,000 to 17,000 people are living with the incurable virus in Bangladesh, according to the UNAIDS report 2003.

Some 33 million HIV patients

died worldwide since the virus was identified in 1981, the report added.

Meanwhile, the global AIDS epidemic scenario shows no sign of abating. Five million people were infected with HIV worldwide and 3 million died in 2003, the highest so far, said a UNAIDS press release.

One out of five adults is now living with HIV/AIDS across southern Africa, the highest rate since the disease broke out as an epidemic, it added.

According to the "AIDS Epidemic Update 2003," the UNAIDS release says, every day in

2003 an estimated 14,000 people were infected with HIV. More than 95% of those infected live in low- and middle-income countries.

The latest report says, an estimated 40 million people are living with HIV worldwide, including 2.5 million children under 15.

In Bangladesh the intravenous drug users (IDU) are the most potential carriers of HIV/AIDS among the vulnerable groups in the country.

The fourth round of the National

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3,625 women fall prey to violence

Mahila Parishad statistics show a rising trend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 3,625 women became victims of violence across the country between January and October this year.

Among them, 1,192 were raped, 306 gang-raped and about 144 murdered after rape. This is the highest incidence of violence against women in recent times.

Statistics show that 645 women committed suicide, 719 were murdered, 359 abducted, 230 acid-burnt and 135 trafficked.

This was revealed yesterday at a press conference organised by

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PHOTO: STAR

The mother of 12-year-old Hosne Ara Begum comforts her after a strand of a fishing spear lodged near her right eye was removed by operation at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Her ordeal over at long last

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 12-year-old girl suffered five days of unspeakable pain in hospital beds with a strand of a multi-pronged fishing spear lodged above her right eye because of utter neglect of doctors in at least two hospitals including Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

After newspapers brought the ordeal of Hosne Ara Begum, a class V student of Sekandarpur Primary School in Habiganj, to light, she was operated upon at the DMCH yesterday.

The girl suffered the severe trauma when a property clash between former chairman Mollahar Hossain Chowdhury and former member Mintu in a Habiganj village spilled over into the house of Alauddin, supporter of one of the warring groups and father of Hosne Ara.

About 300 people attacked the Shivpasha village home of Alauddin with lethal weapons on November 26 that coincided with the Eid-ul-Fitr.

The injuries to 20 others in the clash pale beside the girl, who took the sharp iron strand deep into her skull.

Hosne Ara was taken to Habiganj Sadar Hospital at 7:00pm on the day, but did not receive any treatment. The doctor on duty referred her to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet as he found the case complicated for him to treat.

She was admitted to the hospital in the night, but no senior doctor attended to her even the next day.

At the advice of locals, Alauddin took his daughter to the DMCH where she had to wait three days in bed to find a doctor eligible to operate upon her.

Khaleda expresses solidarity with Palestinian cause

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has reiterated Bangladesh's solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for an independent and sovereign state with Al Quds Al Sharif as its capital.

"This annual commemoration provides us an opportunity to raise greater awareness and promote deeper understanding of the question of Palestine and empathy for the suffering people in occupied Palestinian territories," Khaleda Zia said in a message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

She observed that the day is also a reminder that the Palestinian issue remains far from being resolved despite adoption of numerous UN resolutions and many international peace initiatives spanning over a period of more than half a century.

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Pakistan to end ban on Indian overflights

REUTERS, AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf said yesterday Pakistan would end a ban on Indian flights over its territory, the official news agency reported.

"As a gesture of goodwill, Pakistan will agree to the resumption of overflights with India in the talks being held in New Delhi next week," news agency APP quoted Musharraf as saying.

"Pakistan is sincere in its efforts for peace in the region," it quoted Musharraf as telling a delegation from the Pakistan and India Young Presidents Organization.

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Reshuffle in Banskhali police likely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The authorities are likely to reshuffle Banskhali police soon to make headway in the carnage of 11 members of a family at Shilpara in Sadhanpur union on November 18 midnight.

"The whole setup of the Banskhali Police Station including the officer-in-charge (OC) and the investigation officer (IO), Mohammad Hossain, might be changed shortly," a top officer of the district police said yesterday.

Local people, civil society members and political parties have questioned the indifference of the local police, especially of the OC.

None of the suspects could be arrested until yesterday, 13 days after the gruesome massacre in which the victims including a four-day-old baby and seven women were incinerated.



PHOTO: STAR

Dancers perform at a ceremony marking the International Day for Protest of Violence against Women 2003 at an open-air amphitheatre in Dhanmondi yesterday.

One more dies of dengue in city, toll rises to 8

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another patient died of dengue in the city during the Eid holidays, raising the death toll across the country to eight since November 2, official sources say.

On November 28, Julekha, 17, died at the city's Holy Family hospital, said a hospital source.

During the four-day Eid vacation the number of dengue affected patients rose to 378 till yesterday morning from 337 on November 24.

A total of 41 patients were reportedly infected with dengue virus between November 25 and November 30 morning.

Until yesterday morning, 50 dengue patients remained admitted -- 18 at Holy Family hospital, seven at Suhrawardy hospital, six at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, two at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, two at Chittagong Medical College Hospital and 15 at various city clinics, health directorate sources said.

Meanwhile, eight dengue patients were admitted at various city hospitals and clinics during the last 24 hours starting from November 29 morning.

Ninety-six dengue patients were treated at Holy Family hospital during the last one month.

Three to four dengue patients on average flowed in daily at different hospitals and clinics this year compared to 10 last year, said a top official of the hospital.

"The sporadic advent of this disease with the delayed rainy season in late October this year is indicative that it may recur every year," said a senior physician of Shishu hospital.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) should invigorate mosquito eradication drives throughout the city to contain dengue attack, doctors at various city hospitals opined.

"The DCC is using eight ultra low volume truck-mounted fogger

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Tk 30 lakh worth of timber seized from BNP leader's house

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathira

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on Saturday seized illegally logged timber worth about Tk 30 lakh from the house of Shyamnagar Thana BNP Convenor Sohrab Hossain at Gafura in Shyamnagar upazila.

Sources said BDR troops stationed at Nildumur in the Sundarbans raided the house after being tipped off about the logs and arrested the BNP leader's two sons Abu Hena and Masudul Alam.

The timber was sent to the forest department. A case was lodged with Shyamnagar Police Station.

A section of leaders and activists of the ruling BNP aided by an organised gang are allegedly engaged in pilfering timber wood from the Sundarbans violating a government ban. Every year, huge quantities of valuable trees are being cut down for this illegal trade, sources said.

Shoib taken on 7-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Salauddin Shoib Chowdhury arrested from Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Saturday for his alleged Mossad connection was placed on a seven-day remand yesterday.

Airport police produced Shoib before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court at 3:30pm with a prayer for a 10-day remand.

In the prayer police referred to a written speech that Shoib was supposed to present at a seminar in Tel Aviv which proved beyond doubt that he has been involved in anti-state activities for a long time.

Police also said different fax and e-mail messages seized from Shoib also proved that he passed sensitive information to the

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BJP, Cong lock elections horns in 4 states in run-up to nat'l polls

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

An estimated 9.37 crore voters are expected to exercise their franchise today to choose new legislatures in four Indian states, where Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are locked in a straight fight for power, in an exercise that could have a bearing on parliamentary polls due in September next year.

The electorate is expected to cast votes in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Chhattisgarh

to choose their representatives from among 5,348 candidates to fill a total of 590 seats in what is billed as the last major popularity test less than a year ahead of the next general elections.

The balloting will be held in 102,056 polling stations across the four states manned by five and half lakh electoral personnel under the watchful eyes of more than 4,00,000 security forces.

Most pre-poll surveys have predicted a mixed bag of results

with Congress led by Sonia Gandhi projected to retain power in Delhi and Rajasthan and BJP headed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee likely to regain power from its principal challenger in Madhya Pradesh. It appears to be a close contest in Chhattisgarh although surveys have given an edge to Congress in the state.

The outcome of the elections in the four Hindi-speaking states is widely perceived as an indicator of

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34 shops gutted as fire engulfs local bazaar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

About 34 shops were gutted in a fire at the lone bazaar of Panhari Upazila at Saturday midnight, causing about Tk 50 lakh in losses.

Fire brigade sources and local traders said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at Saturday midnight and soon engulfed the bazaar, leaving most of the shops burnt to ashes.

After locals and army men failed, fire fighters put out the flames.

A village that goes hygiene way

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN, back from Teknaf and Sitakunda

Visitors to outlying Hajompura in Teknaf may be puzzled by a signpost that reads "no-one defecates in the open in this village", but it is a pride for the villagers who all have sanitary latrines.

"We were shocked to know how faeces can creep into drinking water and food. The findings led us to take an initiative to end open-air defecation," said Nurul Alam of Hajompura, head of the village water and sanitation steering committee.

The community-based participatory approach toward total sanitation began in 2001 after the Village Education Resource Centre, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), introduced the concept in a first for the nearly inaccessible village.

"If any villagers do not install sanitary latrines, other neighbours press them to install, as an open latrine affects the community as a whole," Alam said.

The sanitation cost varied from as low as Tk 60 to Tk 180, but the variations in cost do not affect the quality of community sanitation since hygienic practice and tech-

niques are strictly followed by the villagers.

Criteria by the NGO stipulate that the village should not allow open defecation or hanging latrines and emphasise post-defecation hygienic practice, yard and roadside clean-up, safe waste disposal and secure water management.

The villagers formed an action committee of 15, with Alam as its head to quicken the work. It was no easy task, as only 14 of the 163 families in the village had hygienic latrines during the November 2001 survey by the NGO.

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Prayer Timings		
December 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-15	5-21
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation