

Bangladesh go down fighting

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

Despite a whirlwind 76 by Adam Gilchrist, Australia struggled against a fighting Bangladesh on way to a four-wicket win in the first one-day international of the three-match series at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

The dashing left-hander, dropped by Syed Rasel at fine-leg off Mashrafe Bin Mortuza on 39, blew away the home attack during a moderate 196-run chase. But left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak picked up three quick wickets to salvage some pride for the Tigers.

When Gilchrist walked back to the pavilion after his 46-ball assault which produced nine fours and five massive sixes, Australia were well placed at 97-1 in the 11th over. But they had to struggle against the spinners to reach the target in 44 overs.

Ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique might have gone wicketless but he finished with enviable figures of 10-1-14-0.

Michael Hussey, however, kept cool with an unbeaten 36 off 61

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JOINT VENTURE OF PETROBANGLA SUBSIDIARIES Biggest investor Bapex to get smaller share

PORIMOL PALMA

In the first ever joint venture between three subsidiaries of Petrobangla, the biggest investor Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (Bapex) is going to be given a much smaller share than the two others.

In this joint venture agreement (JVA) involving Bapex, Bangladesh Gas Field Company Limited (BGFCL) and Sylhet Gas Field Company Limited (SGFCL) -- Bapex is given a mere 10 percent share in the Begumganj gas field where it invested Tk 21 crore in 1979, which is currently valued to be no less than Tk 300 crore.

But under the JVA, BGFCL and SGFCL will jointly get 70 percent of gas as cost recovery against Tk 150 crore that they will invest for developing the field, officials said, adding

that the rest 30 percent share of the gas will be divided among the three subsidiaries.

The JVA was in principle agreed upon at an energy ministry meeting on March 30 and will be activated after getting approval from the cabinet.

Bapex will incur loss, as it will not have the operatorship. If gas were produced under Bapex's leadership, it would get 45 percent of gas to make itself strong and reduce dependence on the international oil companies. It would also add 55 percent of extracted gas as supplementary duty to government revenue.

Experts said Bapex's loss in the beginning of such a good initiative will have a negative impact.

The JVA among the state-owned companies, a brain-child of Energy Advisor Mahmudur Rahman, aims

at strengthening the companies financially, ensuring energy security and reducing dependence on international oil companies.

In case of gas production under such agreements, the government can buy gas in national currency saving a huge amount of foreign currencies, Mahmudur Rahman said in the recent meeting.

According to the petroleum law, Bapex has the full right to develop and extract gas from Begumganj gas field, as it explored and discovered the field but the draft JVA will give BGFCL the operatorship of Begumganj gas field that has a reserve of extractable 32 billion cubic feet (bcf) gas.

Only 10 percent of gas as profit that Bapex is set to get would rather weaken the company that requires no consultancy in exploring and

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BCL enforces student strike today

DU CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of the main opposition Awami League (AL), has called a student strike at all educational institutions across the country today in protest at killing one of its leaders.

Abdur Rahim Akash, BCL assistant secretary of Shaheed Suhrawardi College unit, died on April 18 after the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) cadres beat up and wounded him on April 12, BCL leaders told a press conference on April 19.

A teacher of the college directed the JCD cadres to beat up Akash as he protested the teacher's falsehood in the class when the teacher claimed that late president Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh on March 26 in 1971, the BCL leaders alleged.

The BCL staged demonstrations on the Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday demanding punishment to the teacher and the JCD cadres responsible for killing Akash.

Parties keep pressure on Nepali king to go

Curfew extended as protests go on

AFP, Kathmandu

Sporadic clashes erupted after Nepal's beleaguered King Gyanendra imposed a fresh curfew on the capital yesterday as the opposition vowed to bring an end to his absolute rule over the Himalayan country.

The streets of Kathmandu were mostly quiet except for occasional protests and minor clashes between police and demonstrators after state television announced the latest 11-hour curfew and mobile phone services remained cut.

But an alliance of seven opposition parties said there would be more demonstrations like the one on Saturday that saw an estimated

300,000 people march to the heavily-guarded heart of the city near Gyanendra's palace.

"There is no way we can join the government and our general strike and peaceful protest will continue," the parties said in a statement on Saturday.

In India, a protestor died Sunday from bullet wounds received in clashes four days earlier in Nepal. He had been rushed to the northern Indian city of Lucknow for treatment.

The Times of India reported some 25,000 Nepalese had fled to India since a general strike and protests began on April 6.

On Sunday, sporadic protests were much smaller than the previous three days with one group of

1,000 on the ring road on the south-west outskirts of the city.

About 50 youths confronted police who charged them with batons and the crowd dispersed, an AFP reporter said.

In the east of the city, some 5,000 gathered chanting: "King leave the country", "Abolish the kingship" and "We want true democracy" but protestors chatted to police.

"The protests are more friendly today," said Umesh Prasai, a 21-year-old businessman. "We're too tired."

The continuing protests are seen as a direct snub to the king's

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Children play in the mud near the Mohammadpur embankment in the city yesterday to have a respite from the sweltering heat.

Separation of judiciary by this year

Moudud tells Butenis

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said separation of the judiciary from the executive would be done during the tenure of the present government that expires in October next.

The minister said this when newly appointed US Ambassador

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'Bacteria infected' fluid costs eyesight of 13

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Thirteen aged people, including nine women, lost their eyesight after allegedly applying bacteria infected "ringer solution" during cataract operation in Naogaon.

Eye Surgeon Nazmul Haque of Bangladesh National Society for Blind (BNSB) Hospital in Naogaon, who conducted the operations on April 1, said 13 out of 22 patients may have lost their vision for good.

BNSB sources said a ringer solution made by Beximco was applied on nine patients after the operation while a similar fluid made by Opso-Saline was applied on 13

others.

The latter group complained of complications and all of them were sent to the BNSB headquarters in Sirajganj on April 3. After examining them, doctors there said these patients may not regain their eyesight.

BNSB sources said the medicines were sent to the Diagnostic Lab in Naogaon and the Avicenna Hospital in Sirajganj for test after three days of the incident.

Dr Shafiqulla of the Diagnostic Lab reported that the Opso-Saline-made solution was bacteria infected.

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Charge sheet soon in Aug 17 blast case in Dhaka

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch (DB) of police is going to press charges soon against Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman, its Second-in-Command Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai and six others in an August 17 bomb blast case.

DB Inspector Munshi Ruhul Quddus, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, will submit the probe report to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM's) Court, Dhaka.

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SERIAL BLASTS Sunny placed on 20-day remand

UNB, Jhalakathi

Ataur Rahman Sunny, military commander of the banned Islamist outfit JMB, was placed yesterday on a 20-day remand for interrogation about his involvement in bomb blasts in Jhalakathi district on August 17 last year.

Judge of the First Class Magistrate Court Mehedi Masuduzzaman granted the remand for two cases filed in connection with the serial bombings, when Sunny was produced before the court. Ten-day remand was granted for each case.

Five people, including police and journalists, were injured when bombs exploded at five points of Jhalakathi town on that day. Two separate cases were filed for bomb explosions near upazila parishad and DC office.

Laden condemns Hamas isolation

Al-Jazeera airs new audiotape

AFP, Dubai

al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden said the international isolation of the Hamas-led Palestinian government is proof of a "war by crusaders and Zionists against Islam," according to an audiotape attributed to him and aired on Arabic television on Sunday.

"Their (the West's) rejection of Hamas after it had won the election ... confirms that there is a crusader-Zionist war against Muslims," he said.

The tape broadcast by the

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Russian split with US on Iran widens

Kremlin faces a stark cost-benefit dilemma

AFP, Moscow

Anxious to be treated as a major world power, Russia now faces a stark cost-benefit dilemma as it weighs consequences of a widening split with the United States over how to confront Iran's nuclear ambition, analysts say.

The United States raised the ante last week, signalling that it intends to exact a price if Russia persists in its refusal to jump aboard an accelerating US diplomatic bandwagon for quick and tough international steps to isolate Iran.

A top US diplomat, Nicholas Burns, emerged from talks here on Iran with Russia and other UN Security Council powers -- talks in which Russia did not budge in opposing US calls for Iran sanctions -- demanding that Moscow drop lucrative nuclear energy and weapons contracts with Tehran.

To hammer the point home, Burns also said the United States now wanted to see "problems" in ex-

Soviet republics on the agenda of the Group of Eight (G8) powerful states -- highly sensitive issues for Russia with the potential to seriously tarnish its first-ever G8 chairmanship this year.

And despite backing membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for Russia's ex-Soviet neighbours and China, the United States continues to withhold its critical support for Russia to join that body, a long-cherished objective of President Vladimir Putin.

Putin accused Washington of changing the WTO rules late in the game, and many observers say all of these issues have some linkage to Kremlin policy on Iran in particular and its newly-assertive foreign policy in general.

"US pressure on Russia is growing," said Vladimir Pribylovsky, analyst with the Moscow-based Panorama policy think tank.

Publicly, Russia has put a proud face on its rejection of US

demands, vowing to continue helping Iran build a nuclear power plant, to sell Iran an air defence system as planned and saying it will not even discuss sanctions without proof of US allegations that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons.

But behind the Kremlin walls, Putin and aides face a quandary over how far -- and how concretely -- to take their tactical opposition to the United States on Iran, knowing that setbacks in the G8, WTO and other forums could have long-term negative economic consequences for Russia, say experts.

Their tactics will be tested further starting later this week when the head of the UN nuclear watchdog delivers a report to the Security Council on Iran's nuclear programme, a report expected to be followed quickly by an intensified US push for strong international steps to isolate Tehran.

The United States accuses Iran of hiding a nuclear weapons programme behind its atomic energy drive, a charge Tehran

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Prayer Timing		
April 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-27	6-31
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation