

TENGRATILA BLOWOUTS

Victims give July 22 deadline to meet demands

Stage sit-in, submit memo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Villagers affected by the Tengratila blowouts have given the authorities a July 22 deadline to meet their 6-point demand and threatened of tougher agitation for non-

compliance.

They announced that office of the Canadian company Niko will be locked and a fast unto death by the affected people will begin on the gas field office premises if the demands are not met by July 22. Niko is drilling

well in Tengratila for gas.

The programmes were announced during agitation by the affected people on Thursday.

They staged a sit-in in front of the gas field office, held a rally and brought out a procession in the area to press their six-point demand including payment of compensation.

Thursday's programmes were held under the banner of Tengratila Dabi Aday Sangram Parishad.

The demonstrators handed over a memorandum to Niko officials, reiterating the demands and setting the deadline to meet those.

Azimuddin Master, convener of the Parishad chaired the rally.

Speakers at the rally said the Canadian company is trying to avoid payment of compensation to affected people by shifting the blame on the government.

The people in the area are united and they will realise the just demands, they said.

The 6-point demand includes payment of Tk 84 crore in compensation for environmental damage, proper compensation for the 611 affected families, employment for locals in the gas field, establishment of a gas-based 50 MW power plant

near Tengratila and a health complex, arrangement for supply of safe water in the affected villages, seestablishment of a health complex in the area and inclusion of 28 more affected families who were dropped 'intentionally' from the compensation list.

The affected people did not get compensation even a year after the second blowout and fire that took place in the field on the night of June 24 last year.

They launched agitation afresh to press their 6-point demand as the Canadian company and the government remained silent on the issue of compensation.

Even, the authorities could not settle payment of compensation for the burnt out gas and environmental damage, which has estimated by a government appointed technical committee.

Explosions took place twice during drilling, which caused extensive damage to the ecology. Most croplands in the area have turned uncultivable and greens have been damaged. Pure water is scarce as the explosions polluted water bodies.

A problem ignored for long

Patuakhali town protection project gathers dust

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

It is a perennial problem, ignored by the government for long. Two-thirds area of Patuakhali town go under water during high tide, mainly in the wet season from June to October.

The most vulnerable areas included Puran Bazar, Chalk Bazar, Kath Patti, Nabab Para, Shimul Bagh, Muslim Para, College Road, Sadar Road, Post Office Road, Munserf Para, where 3 to 4 feet water remains stagnant for a day after the tide.

About 50,000 people in these areas suffer a lot as water inundates most of the houses, shops and other establishments.

Patuakhali town is surrounded by Patuakhali river on the north and Lohalia river on the east. Water from the rivers roll into the town whenever they swell during high tide.

A town protection embankment-cum drainage project, taken up nine years ago, is yet to be implemented.

The Tk 17.27 crore project was taken up after the visit of the then agriculture minister Mazid-Ul-Haque to Patuakhali in 1997.

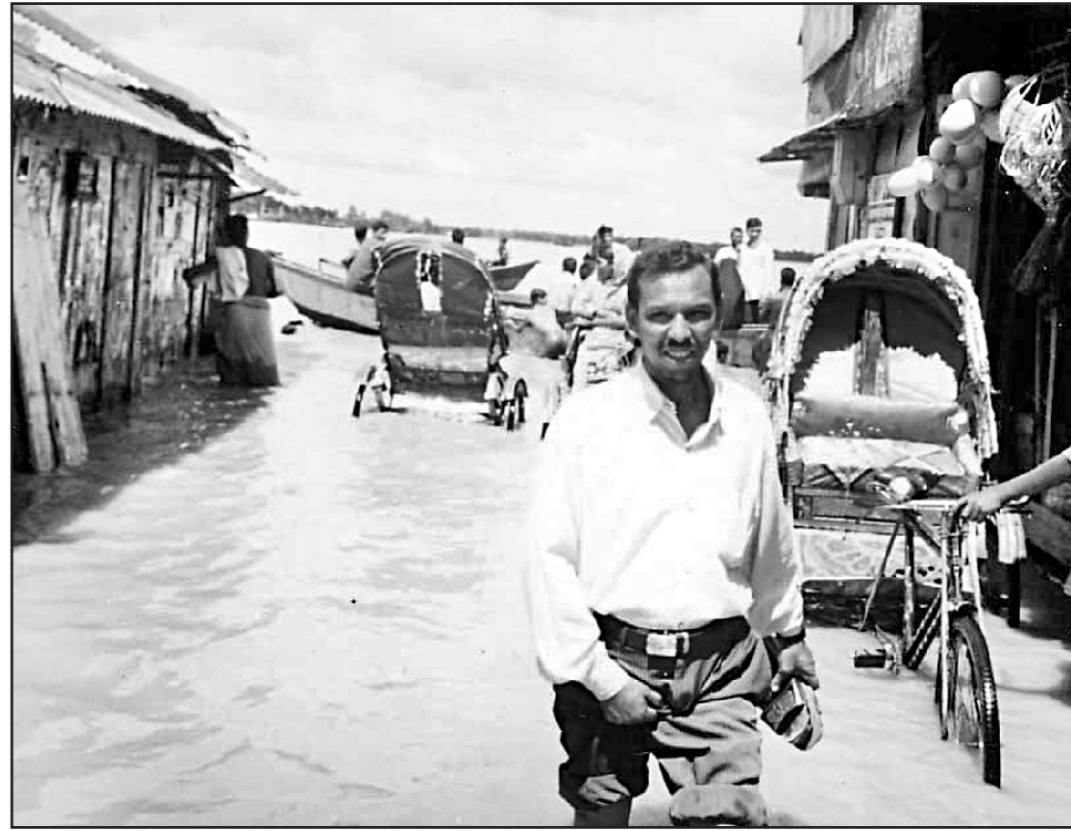
The project includes construction 4.20 km flood control embankment and one kilometre wall and installation of seven sluice gates and four power pumps in 38 outlets.

The project is still awaiting approval by the ECNEC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council).

The Water Development Board (WDB) engaged a consulting firm to make a survey to implement the project. The consulting firm—Centre for Environment and Geographic Information Service (CEGIS)—submitted its report to the water resources ministry in April this year.

Pourasabha Chairman Mostaq Ahmed said the townspeople held demonstrations on numerous occasions for construction of a protection embankment. They have given up hope as all their agitation failed to draw the attention of the authorities.

When contacted, WDB Executive Engineer Abdul Mazid Mollah said, "We sent several letters to higher authorities to take immediate step to implement the project but to no result".



Chawk Bazar area in Patuakhali town on Thursday, inundated by water from Lohalia river during high tide.

PHOTO: STAR



STAR FILE PHOTO

Flames rose up to 300 feet after the blowout at Tengratila gas field during drilling on January 27 this year.

Newsman takes life

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Noapara correspondent of the Daily Ajker Kagaj, Krishna Basu, 34, committed suicide by throwing himself under the wheels of a running train yesterday morning.

He was the son of Pronoy Basu of Noapara Rail Station Bazar in Abhoynagar upazila in Jessore.

Police and family sources said, Krishna Basu had recently started business but incurred heavy losses. He was suffering from deep frustration.

At about 8.15 am, he went to Noapara station and jumped onto the track just before the Benapole bound commuter came. The body was cut into two pieces, police said.

Three to die for carjacking, killing driver, helper

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal has given death sentence to three persons for a double murder in Habiganj in January last year.

The convicts are Masum Ahmed alias Kalam, 32, son of Abdur Razzaque, of Gangpar Purba Bhadeshwar village in Bahubal upazila; Abdus Salalm, 35, son of Abdur Rashid Purba Shahpur village in the same upazila and Sujon Dev, 23, son of Samiran Dev of Purba Barachar Binandapur village in Shaistaganj.

The court also fined Tk 5,000 each. The verdict was given by Judge Biplob Goshwami on Thursday. Masum and Kalam are absconding.

The judge convicted four others to three years' RI and fined them Tk 5,000 each. They are Sohel Khan, Afsar Uddin, Borhanuddin and Sunny Ahmed Sentu, from Demra area in Nartayanganj. Sentu is also absconding.

All of them have been convicted for hijacking a rented microbus by murdering its driver Babul and helper Ashab Ali in Bahubal on the

Sylhet-Dhaka highway on January 2 last year.

The microbus was rented from Habiganj for a trip to Dhaka.

Bahubal police recovered bodies of the driver and the helper next morning. The microbus was recovered from the possession of Sunny in Demra. After hijacking, the vehicle was sold for Tk.44,000 only.

Habiganj Sessions Court sent the case to Speedy Trial Tribunal, Sylhet on 22 March this year.

The court examined 22 prosecution witnesses during the trial.

Demonstration for smooth power supply

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

People under the banner of Sachetan Nagarik Samaj, a civil society body, brought out a procession and held a rally at Shyamnagar upazila headquarters yesterday protesting frequent load shedding and demanding smooth power supply.

The rally was held at Shyamnagar bus stand with the civic body convener Sheikh Zaber Hossain in the chair.

The speakers criticised the government for its failure to ensure smooth supply of power in the

upazila.

They alleged that the severe load shedding is persisting in Satkhira district due to local Power Development Board (PDB) officials' inefficiency and negligence.

They threatened to attack offices of PDB and Rural Electrification Board (REB) of smooth power supply is not ensured within seven days.

The demonstrators also demanded steps to remove the water logging problem at Shyamnagar, caused by inadequate drainage system.

ACID VIOLENCE

2 sisters fight for life at Osmani Hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two minor sisters are fighting for life at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital with serious acid burn injuries. They were admitted to the hospital Thursday morning.

Family sources said, Farzana Akhtar, 14 and Lima Akhtar, 9, sustained serious injuries when acid was thrown on them at about 2 AM Thursday through the window when they were asleep at their house at Khagahata village in Chhatak upazila of Sunamganj district.

Hearing their screams, their parents and other members of the family came and saw the two girls groaning in pain.

They were rushed to Chhatak upazila health complex, wherefrom

they were sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Police officials visited the remote village, about 35 kilometres off the upazila headquarters. The victims are students of class VIII and IV.

Filing of a case is in process, the victims family told this correspondent at the hospital.

When contacted, the Officer-in-Charge of Chhatak thana said previous enmity could be behind the gruesome incident. "We are investigating the matter", he said. Meanwhile, the Sylhet unit of the Committee for Elimination of Acid Violence formed a human chain in front of the Shaheed Minar yesterday demanding immediate arrest and exemplary punishment to the culprits.

10x3

14x3



PHOTO: STAR

Sylhet unit of the Committee for Elimination of Acid Violence formed a human chain at Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday demanding immediate arrest and exemplary punishment to the culprits.