

Deal for offshore exploration signed with Thailand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Thailand will jointly conduct a study to determine probable areas of collaboration prior to offshore hydrocarbon exploration in Bangladesh.

To this effect, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Petrobangla, Bangladesh Oil, Gas & Mineral Corporation and PTTEP, the Thai government owned exploration and production company, in Dhaka yesterday.

Petrobangla Chairman Mosharaf Hossain Bhuiyan and PTTEP President Maroot Mrigadada signed the MoU on behalf of their sides.

Under the agreement, a joint working group will be set up immediately to prepare working schedule to determine where, when and how the offshore survey would be carried on.

Thai Energy Minister Viset Chooipiban and Bangladesh Energy Adviser Mahmudur Rahman attended the signing ceremony.

The agreement is the preliminary stage for ensuring potential exploration of hydrocarbon in future and also for human resource development for Petrobangla, Chooipiban said at the function.

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Tk 2cr illegally imported drugs seized in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Customs officials seized medicine worth over Tk 2 crore as it was illegally brought to Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport yesterday.

Two passengers including a Pakistani citizen were held with the largest-ever consignment of medicine brought without declaration in the country.

The medicine was found in eight huge luggage carried by two passengers - Mohsin Hossain and Faisal Ali, a Pakistani citizen - after a Biman flight from Dubai arrived at Chittagong airport at 10:30am.

As the huge luggage passed the immigration counter without declaration, the customs officials challenged the two passengers carrying them.

After opening the luggage in presence of Customs and airport officials and intelligence agencies, the undeclared medicine was found.

"There were at least 22 types of costly medicines used for cancer, migraine, heart diseases, eye and gynaecological problems as well as obesity-reducing, muscle increasing and energising ones and sexual stimulants," Assistant Commissioner (Airport Customs) Mostafizur Rahman said.

The approximate market price of the seized medicine would be over Tk 2 crore, customs official said.

The defect of the scanner at Shah Amanat International Airport created a scope for the getting undeclared goods released through the airport, customs officials said.

UN watchdog flays US report on Iran nuke

Terms it outrageous, dishonest

REUTERS, Vienna

UN inspectors have protested to the US government and a Congressional committee about a report on Iran's nuclear work, calling parts of it "outrageous and dishonest," according to a letter obtained by Reuters.

The letter recalled clashes between the IAEA and the Bush administration before the 2003 Iraq war over findings cited by Washington about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction that proved false, and underlined continued tensions

over Iran's dossier.

Sent to the head of the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Intelligence by a senior aide to International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei, the letter said an August 23 committee report contained serious distortions of IAEA findings on Iran's activity.

The letter said the errors suggested Iran's nuclear fuel program was much more advanced than a series of IAEA reports and Washington's own intelligence assessments have determined.

It said the report falsely

described Iran to have enriched uranium at its pilot centrifuge plant to weapons-grade level in April, whereas IAEA inspectors had made clear Iran had enriched only to a low level usable for nuclear power reactor fuel.

"Furthermore, the IAEA Secretariat takes strong exception to the incorrect and misleading assertion" that the IAEA opted to remove a senior safeguards inspector for supposedly concluding the purpose of Iran's program was to

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Hafiz off to India for river erosion talk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An 11-member Bangladesh delegation left for India yesterday for a four-day joint inspection in the trans-border areas affected by land erosion due to the rivers shared by both countries.

The Bangladesh team led by the Commerce and Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed will join a 16-member Indian delegation headed by his Indian counterpart Saifuddin Soz today in Kolkata for a two-day meet.

Designed to provide the ministers with a first-hand knowledge of the sufferings of the people during the monsoon flooding of the rivers, the visit includes the inspection of border riverbank preservation work in the West Bengal and Tripura in India and Feni river and some other places in Chittagong and Khagrachhari in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Liakat Ali Chowdhury will join the Bangladesh delegation during the inspection, according to an official source.

The two neighbouring countries share 54 common rivers and a large number of tributaries, with the state of Tripura alone sharing 10 rivers.

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Man linked with 76kg bomb shown arrested in Ramna Batamul case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

An accused in the 76-kg bomb recovery case, filed for an attempt to kill Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, was shown arrested in the Ramna Batamul carnage case and remanded yesterday for seven days.

Earlier on September 10, Mufti Abdul Hannan, operations commander of banned Harkatul Jihad's (Hujji) Bangladesh chapter, was shown arrested in the same case and was being interrogated.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) yesterday produced the accused, Mahmud Azhar alias Mamun of Gangni in Meherpur district, before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka and submitted a petition for showing him arrested in the case.

The CID submitted another petition for placing him on a 10-day remand for interrogation in connection with the Ramna Batamul blasts that left 10 people dead and several others injured on April 16, 2001.

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Prayer Timing		
September 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-35	5-10
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-09	6-12
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

The Consumers' Interest Protection Committee stages a demonstration in Chittagong yesterday with cots for carrying the dead in a symbolic protest against poor medicare and wrong treatment at private hospitals.

Iraq reels from bombs, drive-by shootings

2 GIs among 17 killed; Qaeda leader slain; 20 more bodies found

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Car bombs and drive-by shootings yesterday killed at least 17 people including two US soldiers in a series of attacks around central Iraq while Iraqi security forces killed a top aide of al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, officials said.

The US command said the first soldier died from wounds in the early morning hours after his unit same under attack by small arms, while the second was killed after his vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb south of Baghdad. At least

2,673 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

The attacks came after day that was especially bloody even by Baghdad's standards, when car bombs, mortars and other attacks killed at least 39 people and wounded dozens. Police also uncovered the tortured bodies of 65 men dumped in and around the capital.

The violence persists despite a monthlong security operation by thousands of US and Iraqi troops

around Baghdad aimed mostly at stopping the killings carried out by Sunni and Shia death squads.

A car bomb Thursday targeting a police patrol in a Shia neighbourhood of northern Baghdad missed, instead killing a civilian and wounding 13 others, police said.

Another car bomb then blew up bear the government's passport office in central Baghdad, killing nine people and wounding 17. The injured included four police officers, said police Lt. Bilal Ali.

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PRGF LOAN

IMF says NCB reform key to next instalment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) yesterday said release of the sixth instalment of the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan will depend on the government's move for revenue mobilisation and nationalised commercial bank (NCB) reform.

"We have raised a couple of issues with the government and we are waiting for the government to come back to us and tell us how they are going to address the issues...we have passed the ball to them,"

visiting IMF mission chief Thomas Rumbaugh said yesterday.

Rumbaugh, adviser of the IMF Asia Pacific Department, was talking to journalists at the local IMF office in the capital at the end of his team's 10-day visit to Bangladesh.

On the possibility of getting around \$80 million PRGF loan, he said the matter could be placed for discussion at the IMF executive board in October provided that Bangladesh government continues to implement the policies aimed at macroeconomic stability and advances key reforms.

The IMF mission chief lauded the government's move in privatising Rupali Bank and suggested for corporatisation of other NCBs.

"The reform of nationalised commercial banks has taken a great leap forward with the announcement of a preferred bidder for Rupali Bank...This success should give momentum to reform of the remaining NCBs," he said.

"The next priority is the corporatisation of NCBs which would provide their management and

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Opposition plans big for Sept 18 rally

Hasina to declare intense agitation for reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party opposition combine yesterday directed its grassroots level leaders to prepare for the final round of anti-government agitation programme which they hinted would begin after the September 18 grand rally.

At a preparatory meeting with the

leaders of 20 districts of Dhaka division, they decided to bring Dhaka to a standstill by bringing 10 lakh people at the grand rally in bid to force the government accept their electoral reforms proposal.

The meeting was held at AL's central office on Bangabandhu

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Maj Mannan's motorcade attacked in Noakhali

20 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

The motorcade of Maj (ret) Abdul Mannan, secretary general of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, came under attack in Noakhali yesterday that left at least 20 leaders and activists wounded.

Witnesses said the attackers swooped on the tail end of the

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