



A fake 'bill book' issued to a gas consumer in Ghatihata area of Brahmanbaria. Inset, pipes confiscated from different areas are brought to the Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited office, in Ghatura of Sadar upazila, on a tractor wagon.

PHOTO: MASUKHRIDYO

ILLEGAL GAS CONNECTIONS

Racket pocketing crores of taka a month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

An illegal gas line racket in three upazilas of Brahmanbaria has been plundering natural gas worth crores of taka from gas supply lines each month. The organised criminals are so reckless that they are even issuing "demand notes" and "bill books" to their clients, mentioning the name of Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited (BGDCL), and collecting "monthly gas bills" in bank accounts they opened with different banks. The racketeers include public representatives including a chairman of a union parishad and several local political leaders, alleged locals. They said in Brahmanbaria Sadar, Sarail and Ashuganj upazilas, the crime syndicate so far "sold" at least 15,000 illegal connections and they usually collect Tk 60 thousand to Tk 90 thousand

for each connection, based on the distance of a consumer's house from the main line. However, sales division officials at Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited (BGDCL) said the number of illegal connections in those upazilas would be around 5,000 and they traced 54,031 feet of illegal gas line in those areas. Most of the illegal connections BGDCL found were in Suhilpur and Budhal unions under Sadar upazila, the officials said, adding that BGDCL has 24,000 valid residential gas connections in the three upazilas. Locals requesting anonymity, apparently for security reasons, said the key figures in the illegal gas line racket include Suhilpur Union Parishad (UP) Chairman and Jubo League's Sadar upazila unit Joint Secretary Azad Hajari Angur, a member of the same UP and Jubo League's Organising Secretary of the same unit Mohsin Khandaker, Belal

Mia from Bakail village in Suhilpur union, Kazi Pabel and Kazi Manzu from Ghatura village in the same union, and Sahed Mia from Madhhayapara of Brahmanbaria town. Engineer Zahidur Reza, deputy general manager of BGDCL in Brahmanbaria, said they disconnect illegal connections routinely and last year alone, with assistance from the local administration, they so far confiscated 17,953 feet of gas pipes that were laid illegally. The gas line racket is so powerful that they are often attacking BGDCL officials during disconnection drives, he said, adding that on Monday, they handed over two people to police for attacking four BGDCL officials during a drive in Kalishima area of Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila. The pace of disconnecting and confiscating illegal pipes by BGDCL is not fast enough as the gas line racket

lays kilometres of illegal pipeline in one night. As such, the number of illegal gas connections are on the rise, said locals. Requesting not to be named, a resident of Malihata village in Suhilpur union said he paid Tk 70 thousand for an illegal connection to his house two and a half years ago. Like others, he was not given any "bill book", but he has been paying his "gas bill" against the "demand note" each month to an account with United Commercial Bank. Another resident of the same village said after getting gas connection from the same people, he found out later that the documents he had received against the connection were all fake. According to Bangladesh Gas Act 2010, consumption of natural gas illegally is punishable by three months to a year of jail term and subject to fines between Tk 10 thousand and Tk 5 lakh.

Sinking into the depths

FROM PAGE 1
Sagor said they got wages regularly in the first two months but since then delays in payment began. Every month they had to ask the management for pay. Around a month ago, operations at the factory, which is some 20km away from Kuala Lumpur, stopped, he said. The migrants filed a complaint with the Malaysian labour department and on February 8 wrote to Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur seeking intervention. "We have not had any help from the Bangladesh high commission. We are now in total uncertainty," he said. He said they also tried to contact the recruiting agency but failed to get any help. The Daily Star could not reach Jahirul Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh in Malaysia, despite repeated phone calls yesterday. Noor Ali, managing director of Unique Eastern Pvt, said he had no idea that the workers were facing problems. "Let me talk to them. I will take immediate action," he told The Daily Star yesterday evening. Abu Hayat, an independent researcher and migrant rights activist based in Kuala Lumpur, said it was unfortunate that none of the authorities were extending a helping hand to the migrants. These workers paid so much for migration that they need more than two years in Malaysia to recover the cost, he said. "Bangladesh high commission should intervene in the issue immediately and ensure justice for them," he said. The workers could be transferred to other companies or compensated, Abu Hayat said. He said labour recruitment from Bangladesh has been suspended since September last year following allegations of irregularities. Now, talks for a new recruitment deal between Bangladesh and Malaysia are at the final stage. The Daily Star could not get in touch with SSN Medical Products Sdn Bhd for comments.

HC to hear Khaleda's bail

FROM PAGE 1
In reply, Khaleda's lawyer Khandaker Mahbub Hossain told the court that there was no legal bar for his client to move the petition before the court. The court then fixed Sunday for hearing the petition. Moudud Ahmed, Zainul Abedin, and Sagir Hossain Leon also appeared for the BNP chief. Khaleda, who is now in jail, filed the bail petition with the HC on Tuesday, citing poor health. In the petition, the BNP chief said she has been suffering from several diseases like diabetes and dental problem, and her physical condition has been deteriorating since December 12 last year. She is now seriously ill. She cannot move freely, take food, and medicine without the help of others. She needs immediate treatment/therapy abroad, like in the UK, says the petition. Earlier, the Supreme Court's HC Division denied her bail twice in the case and the Appellate Division once. On August 8, 2011, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the Zia Charitable Trust graft case with Tejgaon Police Station against four people, including Khaleda. They were accused of abusing power in raising funds for the trust from unknown sources. A special court in Dhaka jailed Khaleda and three others for seven years in the case on October 29, 2018. The BNP chief landed in jail after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case by the same special court on February 8, 2018. On October 30, 2018, the HC enhanced her punishment to 10 years in the case after dismissing her appeal.



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