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WB offers conditional support for gas sector development

By A Special Correspondent

The World Bank has informed the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources that it would be prepared to provide money for only a part of the government's investment plan in the gas sector. This money will be available from next year if the gas price is raised and other prior conditions are fulfilled.

The government has been discussing a major programme of investment in the gas sector with the World Bank since the late Eighties. The investments that were considered at various times during this discussion include the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad pipeline, exploration and development of wells in Rashidpur and Kallashatla, surface facilities at Rashidpur and upgrading of the North South condensate line to a natural gas liquid transporting line.

These discussions were derailed at different points in time. Delay in construction of a key in natural gas liquid (NGL) fractionating plant in Ashuganj

was a key reason. The delay occurred firstly because the World Bank refused to award the contract to the bidder chosen by the government on procedural grounds. Protesting this, the government withdrew its request to the Bank to finance construction of the plant. The contract was awarded by the government to a Canadian company. The bid that the World Bank had recommended the government accepted was higher. In subsequent developments the contract between the Canadian company and the government went sour. Arrangements for construction of the plant are still to be firmed up.

While the government struggled unsuccessfully to get the NGL fractionating plant construction started, the World Bank's lending policy for the energy sector underwent a change. Under the new policy energy sector development was to be left mostly to the private sector. With this change in

strategy the dialogue between the government and the Bank became focused on drawing up of a credible programme for promotion of private sector participation in the gas sector. Along with this came the questions of setting up of a new gas transmission company, restructuring of the exploration arm of Petrobangla and gas price increase, coupled with a cut in the government take out of revenue from gas sales.

Last September all of these issues were thrashed out between the government and a visiting World Bank mission. The government was hoping that in view of its decision to open up the gas sector to private investment, set up a gas transmission company and to restructure BAPEX the Bank will finally agree to go ahead with the Gas Infrastructure Development Project.

The current outlook, as outlined in a letter last week from the World Bank to the Energy Ministry, is that at best only

part of this hope will be realised.

The World Bank will fund construction of a gas pipeline between Ashuganj and Bakhrabad, three wells at Rashidpur, related surface facilities and setting up of the SCADA system. This founding will be made available if gas price is raised by 10 per cent with concurrent reduction of government take from 62 per cent to 55 per cent of unit retail gas price and the newly set up gas transmission company is made functional. In addition, the newly created Environmental and Safety Division of Petrobangla will have to be formally launched and a study of privatisation options in the gas sector shall have to be launched.

As for the remaining part of the original Gas Infrastructure Development Project, the World Bank has said that these may be discussed only after construction arrangements for the Ashuganj NGL fractionating plant are firmed up.

Yangon allows UN inspection of refugees' return

YANGON, Nov 5: Myanmar on Friday signed an agreement to provide UN officials with complete access to refugees returning from Bangladesh, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced, report AP.

The memorandum of understanding, signed by a senior UNHCR official during a visit here, is expected to accelerate the return of more than 200,000 Muslim refugees from Myanmar who have been inside Bangladesh since early 1992.

Sources here described the agreement as a milestone in the ongoing voluntary repatriation programme.

The understanding signed today was the result of an agreement reached in July during a visit here by UNHCR chief Sadako Ogata.

same freedom of movement as all other nationals," a UNHCR statement said.

More than a quarter of a million Myanmar Muslims fled to Bangladesh two years ago from Rakhine province — also called Arakan — alleging persecution by government soldiers who forced them into unpaid labour, grabbed their farmland and raped women.

The lack of documentation among many of the Muslims, who have long faced discrimination, served as a pretext for official harassment.

Myanmar officials say that so far 44,664 Muslim refugees have returned from UNHCR camps in Bangladesh. Progress in repatriating the refugees has been slow in part because of Myanmar's previous refusal to allow UN supervision of their return.

The memorandum of understanding also provides for the establishment of a UNHCR liaison office in Yangon which will come under the umbrella of the

JS winter session from Nov 21

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad will meet for its winter session on November 21 at 4 pm.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday officially summoned the Sangsad to meet on that date.

The coming session will be the 12th of the fifth Parliament. It is meeting after a recess of 53 days. The autumn session was prorogued on September 27.

According to Parliament sources, the session is likely to last three weeks. The detailed agenda of the session will be fixed by the Business Advisory Committee which is expected to meet on November 18.

All the major parties and groups in Parliament are likely to hold meetings of their parliamentary wings before the Sangsad goes into session to discuss their respective strategies.

The short winter session is, however, likely to generate some heat on issues centering round the Parliamentary probe body relating to irregularities in the Ministry of Irrigation, Water Development and Flood Control.

Hasina leaves for Beijing

Awami League president and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina left for Beijing yesterday on a fortnight's visit at the invitation of the Communist Party of China, reports UNB.

Hasina is leading a four-member delegation to the Chinese capital where she is expected to meet top leaders of the government and the Communist Party.

Other members of the delegation are: Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad, SAMS Kibria and Abul Hasan Chowdhury MP.

Chinese Ambassadors in Dhaka Zhang Xujiang and Awami League leaders Abdul Mannan, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury MP, Abdur Razzak MP, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Jalil, Obaidul Qader, Dr Mizanul Haq MP and Mohammad Hanif, among others, were present at the airport to see off Hasina.

Hasina and the members of her delegation are expected to return on November 19.

PM assures teachers of curbing violence

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia last night assured the university teachers of taking effective measures for uprooting campus violence.

Over 30 Dhaka University teachers and officials headed by Vice Chancellor Prof Emajuddin Ahmed met the Prime Minister at her Sugandha office at 9 pm and expressed their sense of insecurity following the death of Jimmatul Islam Jinnah in broad daylight on the campus last Monday.

Pro VC of the DU Wakil Ahmed, university deans, provosts, syndicate members and representatives of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) were also present at the 90-minute long meeting with

the PM. Sources said, the DUTA handed over a memorandum to the Prime Minister which said, the terrorists were supplied with arms from outside.

The DUTA memorandum urged the PM to take initiatives to stop the flow of arms supply to the universities and ensuring security.

Begum Zia told the university delegates that the BNP government had passed the Anti-Terrorist Act to check terrorism and all terrorists belonging to any political party would be punished according to laws.

Meanwhile, the situation on the Dhaka University campus was calm yesterday although



Deans, provosts, Syndicate members and leaders of the Teachers' Association of the Dhaka University led by its Vice-Chancellor Professor Emajuddin Ahmed, called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her Sugandha office yesterday. Education Minister Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar and Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain are seen on the right and left of the Prime Minister.

NEWS BRIEFS

Mannan AL acting president

Awami League presidium member Abdul Mannan will be the acting president of the party during Sheikh Hasina's absence. Awami League president Sheikh Hasina left Dhaka yesterday on a 15-day visit to China, reports UNB.

Biman resumes int'l flights from Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Nov 5: Biman yesterday resumed its flight operation on two of its international routes from here after a month's suspension from October 2, official sources said today. Biman authorities cancelled its services in October on the Chittagong-Bangkok and Chittagong-Calcutta routes, because one of its two F-28 aircraft was sent for overhauling.

Police raid JN college

By Staff Correspondent

Police raided Jagannath University College at early hours yesterday and recovered a huge arms and ammunition. Police said, they hauled two sawed off guns, 42 rounds of ammunition and crackers during the raid. None was however, arrested.

Saifur back home

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday returned home from Gambia after attending the 13th annual meeting of the Board of governors of the Islamic Development Bank. The two-day meeting ended at the Gambian capital Banjul on November 3, reports UNB.

Rafiqul Islam returns

Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia returned home last night after attending the ministerial conference on urbanisation in Asia and the Pacific held in Bangkok on November 2. The Works Minister also visited the housing projects in Singapore and discussed bilateral issues with his counterpart there. He led a 3-member Bangladesh delegation at the conference, reports BSS.

9m to be infected by AIDS in South East Asia by 2000

By Asiuzzaman

More than 90 per cent of the world's AIDS patients will be living in Asia, Africa and Latin America by the year 2000, a recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report indicated.

"We also anticipate that the number of cases of HIV infection will proportionally increase mostly in Asia, with up to nine million infections in the South East Asia region by that period," the WHO Associate Director on Global Programmes on AIDS said.

The report was discussed in the just-concluded three-day conference of health ministers of the WHO South East Asia Region which comprises 11 countries. The conference ended in the city Wednesday.

As of July 1, 1993, the WHO estimates that the worldwide cumulative total of over 13 million adults and one million children have been infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) since the beginning of the pandemic in the 1980s.

Despite the alarming figure of HIV infections, some 700,000

adult AIDS cases have been reported from 184 countries, WHO official Dr Peter Piot, said in his report, adding that the actual number of AIDS cases may exceed 2.5 million.

"There are now very few countries left that have not reported AIDS cases," the report said.

Bhutan has, of late, detected HIV infection which was reported during the health ministers' conference.

The situation will take a serious turn by the year 2000 when the HIV infected population will get full-bloom AIDS. In the past one year, half a million people with HIV infection had developed AIDS, Dr Piot said.

In South and South East Asia, the WHO estimates some 30,000 cumulative cases in adults and children but only 2002 have been reported so far. While the maximum number of cases of HIV positive have been reported in India and Thailand, HIV has also rapidly spread elsewhere in the region.

In Bangladesh, 9 people were found to be HIV-positive. One of

them died of AIDS last year. The incubation period for HIV infection to full-bloom AIDS is eight to 10 years or more.

"The full impact of HIV infection in Asia will only become visible by the end of the century when many of the currently infected individuals will have developed AIDS," Dr Piot said.

He pointed out that wherever HIV infection has become well established, a tuberculosis epidemic follows the AIDS epidemic as its shadow.

Nearly 60 per cent of all TB patients in sub-Saharan and Caribbean were HIV positive and the region, including the United States, is experiencing an unexpected and dramatic rise of TB.

Health experts suggested effective preventive measures through sex education to check growing HIV infection and AIDS.

In Bangladesh, a new AIDS/STD Directorate is being set up and the matter got attention from the highest political level, the WHO official mentioned in his report.

For wearing Islamic head scarves!

NANTUA (France), Nov 5: A junior high school expelled four girls Friday for wearing Islamic head scarves, underscoring the friction between France's secular schools and the deep faith of some Muslim immigrants, reports AP.

Jean Damestoy, principal of the Xavier Bichat school in Nantua, said that the girls could return to school in the next week if they leave the scarves at home. If they stay away for eight days, the expulsion becomes permanent.

Two of the girls are of Moroccan origin, sisters of a student expelled from the school three years ago for wearing the scarf, known as a *hidjab*. The other two are Turkish.

Their families say that the *hidjabs* are not fashion items, but a means of religious expression.

About one-quarter of Xavier-Bichat's 760 students, who range from 11 to 14 years in age, come from Muslim backgrounds. The small town is located about 450 kilometres south of Paris.

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ADP implementation rate falls by 3 pc

By Inam Ahmed

The implementation rate of the fiscal 1992-93 Annual Development Programme (ADP) fell short of the previous year's rate by three percentage points, according to preliminary reports.

The rate for 1992-93 was 81 per cent with the total spending of Taka 6554.43 crore. The year before, the public expenditure was about Taka 6,000 crore, according to different donor sources.

During 1992-93, the total allocation of the ADP was Tk 8650 crore which was later revised to Tk 8121 crore before this year's budget.

The actual expenditure of the outlay which has fallen short by about Tk 1500 crore reflects the government's weak project implementation capacity.

Of the total ADP expenditure, Tk 3394 crore had been from the project aid outlay and the rest from Taka outlay.

A top official of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), however, observed that the implementation rate of last year was 'quite positive'. He referred to

the government's absorption of ADB funds during the year. The ADB had 241 million US dollar as project aid during 1992-93, of which 223 million dollars had been spent.

But some government sources pointed out that the IME Division of the Planning Commission is now taking utilisation figures of project aid from the Economic Relations Division (ERD). They said the ERD is supplying the disbursement figure which is usually higher than the actual expenditure. They said this has inflated the 1992-93 implementation figure slightly.

According to sources, expenditures in agricultural sector, rural development, water resource, physical planning and housing sectors had been alarmingly poor.

In agriculture, Tk 370 crore had been spent out of a total outlay of Tk 488 crore. Tk 365 crore had been spent on rural development against the outlay of 518 crore and Tk 235 crore was spent in physical planning and housing sector against the outlay of Tk 340 crore.

Crimes continue to rise in city

By Farid Ahmed

Incidents of crimes — murders, suicides and road accidents — went up in the Dhaka metropolitan area alarmingly in October compared with the previous month.

Last month Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) began a special drive to curb crimes in the city.

In October, 58 people were killed in different incidents as against 42 people in September.

Of these, twelve were murdered, eight committed suicide, 33 fell victims to reckless driving and five were found dead. In the previous month, five people were murdered, six committed suicide and 31 died in road accidents.

A Deputy Commissioner of the DMP said that the law and order situation had deteriorated in the city in early October and the special police drive against

the criminals had been continuing since October 12.

The most sensational murder was committed by a magistrate, Liaquat Ali Khan, who stabbed another magistrate, Shaheeda Chowdhury, to death as she reportedly refused to marry him.

Police has not been able to

Monthly roundup

arrest Liaquat even after 17 days of the murder. Police believe Liaquat has fled the country.

According to a source, police could not finalise any charge-sheet in 12 murder cases.

Besides, robberies, muggings, extortion, and other violent incidents kept the city quite tense in October. The number

of suicides also increased in the city. Despite provisions for punishment of those attempting suicide and those abating them under the penal code, these cases are hardly investigated. Last month, eight people, most of them women, killed themselves in the city.

Road mishaps claimed 33 lives. A tragic road accident near Darus Salam police box in Mirpur on October 29 killed three members of a family, in another mishap, a couple with their five-year-old daughter were burned to death after their car collided with a container train at Kamalapur on October 4.

No headway has yet been made in the police investigation into this tragic accident.

Police also recovered five unidentified bodies from different city areas last month. Again, no progress has been achieved by the investigators.

Hazratbal: No headway yet

SRINAGAR, Nov 5: A new negotiator resumed talks today with Muslim guerrillas holed up inside Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine as police slapped a curfew and broke up sporadic protests, reports AP.

Mehmood Ur Rehman, a top Kashmir administration official, held three rounds of talks with rebel leaders inside the Hazratbal Mosque in a bid to end the

standoff which entered a 21st day, but made no headway.

Rehman replaced Wajahat Habibullah, who was critically injured Thursday when his car collided with an army truck, to take over the reins of the negotiations.

Habibullah, Kashmir's divisional commissioner, is showing 'marginal response although he continued to be in coma, M N Saberwal, director general of Jammu and Kashmir police, said today.

Ishaq made a great sacrifice: Leghari

ISLAMABAD, Nov 5: Feroq Leghari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's nominee for Pakistan president, has been given a boost for next week's election with the withdrawal of former president Ghulam Ishaq Khan from the race, reports AFP.

Ishaq Khan's exit, along with three others, leaves 10 candidates seeking the post which will be decided on November 13 by a 460-strong electoral college comprising members of parliament and four provincial assemblies.

Ishaq Khan's departure has lessened the threat of splitting the pro-Bhutto votes, political analysts said today.

coalition government are still in the running. They are Baluchistan province's former governor Akbar Bugti and a veteran politician Nawabzada Nasrullah.

Leghari said 'we are grateful' to Ishaq Khan for stepping aside and hope both Bugti and Nasrullah will do so in coming days.

The biggest challenge to Leghari, currently Foreign Minister in Bhutto's cabinet, is expected to come from the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League (PML) of former premier Nawaz Sharif.

The PML currently has five candidates, including acting president Washim Sajjad and former National Assembly Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan.

Cooperatives Day today

By Staff Correspondent

The National Cooperatives Day will be observed throughout the country today.

The day is observed every year with the aim of promoting cooperative movement in the country and encouraging the cooperators for capital formation.

The National Cooperative Union has organised a week-long 'Cooperative Fair' in the city. President Abdur Rahman Biswas will inaugurate the fair at 6 pm today. The fair will remain open for all from tomorrow till November 12, from 10 am to 8 pm.

On the eve of the day, President Abdur Rahman Biswas in a message yesterday said the government was pledged-bound to effectively use the cooperative movement in the alleviation of poverty and national prosperity.

He said the cooperative