

Exploration of gas, oil begins in Rangamati

BANDARBAN, Nov 1: The exploration of natural gas and oil began today in Shisuk area under Rangamati district, reports BSS.

Officials said exploration in other demarcated areas under Bandarbon district would begin after November 15.

According to sources in the security forces, United Meridian Corporation, an oil exploration company of the USA, has started survey with the assistance of the security forces.

In February, the company signed an agreement with the Petrobangla to carry out exploration of oil and gas in the hilly areas of Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Bandarban and Cox's Bazar districts.

The company will invest 12.40 billion US dollar in the seven-year-long project, officials said.

It has also taken an initiative to appoint 1500 workers for the project. They said exploration work would be carried out in about 13 thousand square kilometre area.

Khaleda, Prodhan discuss future course of action

Jagga President Shafiqul Alam Prodhan called on BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia at her 29 Minto Road official residence yesterday, reports UNB.

During their 50-minute talks, the two leaders discussed the ongoing movement and exchanged views about the future course of action.

After the meeting, Prodhan told newsmen that a major, united political programme would be announced shortly by the nationalist, democratic and Islamic forces.

See Page 12 Col 3

Border trade thru Tamabil resumes

From Staff Correspondent SYLHET, Nov 1: Normalcy has returned in the Stripur and Tamabil border areas with resumption of border trade through Tamabil customs checkpoint yesterday, said an official this afternoon.

Collection of stones in the Stripur stone quarry has also resumed in full swing while plying of minibuses and other vehicles including trucks carrying stones on the Sylhet-Tamabil Jafflong road also resumed today.

ALPP meets today

A meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party will be held at the ruling party's meeting room in Jatiya Sangsad Bhawan at 3 pm today, reports UNB.

Prime Minister and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting.

Abdullah has requested all Awami League MPs to attend the meeting.

The Daily Star on the Internet
<http://www.dailystarnews.com>

Inside Today

Article

Majority Must be Allowed to Rule

by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Page 4

Focus

Law and Our Rights

Meeting on ending violence against women and girls in South Asia

A commitment renewed Page 5

International

No new N-deals with Iran, China assures US

Page 8

Business

Shrimp farms seek more time to meet EU criteria

DSE index increases by 2 points Pages 6, 7

Winter session begins today

BNP won't return to Parliament

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its seventh session this afternoon with the major opposition party, BNP, sticking to its decision not to join it.

In line with its stance, the BNP yesterday boycotted the JS Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting and also did not attend the Speaker-hosted luncheon, aimed at forging a negotiation between BNP and the ruling Awami League.

However, the adjourned meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party (BNPPP) is due to resume at 7 pm today to further discuss its stance on the parliamentary session. The BNPPP meet was adjourned on Thursday after most of its members spoke for continuing their abstention from attending the parliamentary proceedings "unless a conducive political atmosphere was created".

During a meeting on Friday, BNP Chief Begum Khaleda Zia was quoted as saying that her party would return to parliament unless the "polluted atmosphere was removed".

The AL Parliamentary Party is also due to meet at 3 pm this afternoon at the Sangsad Bhawan.

BNP started its abstention on August 30, the opening day of the last session, to press its 14-point charter of demand including proportionate representation of the party in the JS committees and withdrawal of 'political' cases against its members.

Yesterday's meeting of the BAC, attended by the representatives of the AL, Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami, decided that the JS session will continue till November 16, with seven working days.

The meeting, chaired by See Page 12 Col 8

Magurchhara Drilling of relief well at gas field nearing end

From Staff Correspondent SYLHET, Nov 1: Drilling of the relief well at the Magurchhara gas field is nearing completion and expected to be completed shortly, said an official in Moulvibazar district administration today.

He said, with this, capping of the mouth of the burnt out gas well will be completed. Drilling of the relief well began at the third location in the gas field area on October 6. Then Occidental, the US company drilling the gas well, will arrange drilling of a fresh well at a nearby location, he added.

Meanwhile, the railway authorities are contemplating to resume train service through the old rail track attached to the Magurchhara gas field, the See Page 12 Col 3

Maddhyapara Hard Rock Mining Project Huge layer of granite struck but its viability now being questioned

By Sharier Khan, back from Maddhyapara

The North Korean mine operators have struck a 'virtually infinite layer of granite' at the Maddhyapara Hard Rock Mining Project (MHRMP) site in Dinajpur at a depth of 167 metres, but the authorities in Dhaka are now questioning viability of the project.

According to project officials, Tk 245 crore has already been spent and 31 per cent of the project work has been completed.

The mine operators, who consider it "a gold mine" because of the high quality of rock and its prospects, have already begun extracting hard rock while sinking two shafts simultaneously to reach a target depth of 314 to 370 metres.

"These extracted hard rocks are by-products of the mine. But we can sell it from June in hundreds of tons and help the government recover part of the total project cost", General Manager of MHRMP Maqbul-E-Elahi said.

From June next year, MHRMP would start producing 300 tons of hard rock — but no arrangement has been made so far to ensure transportation of the minerals by road or railway. If the transportation problem is not solved in time, the project will suffer heavily, officials said.

Implementation of the MHRMP has already suffered due to an 18-month delay in ensuring power supply to the remote Maddhyapara area, selection of consultant and construction of roads for carrying heavy mining equipment there. Power supply was ensured only last month.

According to official documents, the Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation for this project this year has not been disbursed. As per a revised Project Proforma, Tk 270 million is required for uninterrupted implementation of the project.

Last month, a five-member committee headed by the Finance Secretary was set up to review viability of the project.

This committee was formed when the revised Project Pro See Page 12 Col 1



Police fired tear gas shells to disperse clashing supporters of Abahani KC and Mohammedan SC during the 18th Damal Smriti Cricket Tournament at the Dhaka Stadium yesterday. (Story on page 10) — Star photo

1000 refugees to return a day from Nov 21

From Reaz Ahmad

KHAGRACHHARI, Nov 1: All preparations have been made in this southern hill district for the repatriation of Chakma refugees from the Indian state of Tripura, expected to begin on November 21.

According to the district administration, arrangements have been made to receive some 1,000 returnees everyday.

The 7th round of peace talks between the National Committee of Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCHT) and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), the apex body of Shantibahini, is scheduled to be held in Dhaka on November 16. At the talks, a peace treaty is expected to be signed between the parties, ending decades-old insurgency in the CHT.

Talking to a group of newsmen this afternoon at his residence, Deputy Commissioner of Khagrachhari Mohammad Ismail said the refugees will come through 'Kathalchhari-Ramgarh' and 'Tabalchhari-Matiranga' border routes.

Some 6,703 refugees belonging to 1,248 families had returned home during the first phase of repatriation this year from March 28 to April 17.

There still remains 33,000 refugees in five camps in Amarapur and another 10,000 in Sabroom in Tripura, district officials said.

The DC said the administration and community leaders are putting in their best efforts to clear any confusion or misgiving among the people. He informed that on October 10, some 700 people representing various communities attended a meeting convened by him at the town hall here. Both tribal headmen and chairmen and members of 'cluster villages' attended the meeting and spoke in favour of an "enduring peace," the DC said.

The districts population is about four lakh.

Meanwhile, some leaders of various opposition political parties also had a meeting recently with the DC. They expressed their doubt over various key issues like fate of Bengalee settlers, presence of army and the issue of autonomy.

The DC claimed that as the expected date of signing of the treaty is nearing, 'peace' has become a commonplace in the region. No incident of disturbance was reported from any part of the district in recent days, he added.

Of the four lakh people in the See Page 12 Col 8

Marma students for peaceful co-existence of tribals, non-tribals

KHAGRACHHARI, Nov 1: Speakers at a conference, marking the 8th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Marma Students' Council, here yesterday called for peaceful co-existence of both tribals and non-tribals in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, reports UNB.

Kalparanjani Chakma MP formally inaugurated the conference as chief guest while Mong Circle Raja Raula Prud Chowdhury was present as special guest.

See Page 12 Col 6

Pakistan names 5 new judges

ISLAMABAD, Nov 1: The Pakistani government named five new judges today to expand the country's Supreme Court, handing victory to Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah in a bitter legal row with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reports Reuters.

The appointment of the judges, promoted from provincial High Courts, was confirmed by President Farooq Leghari after parliament passed a government-sponsored bill formally setting the top court's strength at 17.

All five were nominated by Justice Shah for promotion in August but Sharif's refusal to implement the recommendation See Page 12 Col 6

Goods worth Tk 27 lakh seized at ZIA

The customs surveillance team at Zia International Airport seized goods, including computer parts, watches, medicine, cosmetics, 2299 grams of gold ornaments and 50 gold bars worth about Tk 27 lakh from three passengers on Friday night, reports BSS.

Sources at the surveillance team said the passengers were returning from Calcutta, Saudi Arabia and Singapore respectively.

The surveillance team seized the goods and gold ornaments as they were crossing the green and red channel of the airport without declaring the goods or gold.

Pilot project in 200 villages to fight arsenic contamination

By Naimul Haq

An emergency government programme will be formulated to address the 'national disaster', declared by the government in May.

The 307.912 US dollar six-month programme, financed by the UNDP, will be implemented jointly by the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health (DOEH) and National Institute of Prevention and Social Medicine (NIPSOM) with the help of the Health Directorate, Dhaka Community Hospital local NGOs.

Talking to The Daily Star Project Director Dr AZM Ifthikhar Hussain said, "There are about 1800 confirmed cases of arsenicosis across the country and a large number of people in at least 60 districts are in the risk of being contaminated. It is a very sensitive issue. One should not panic but understand the problem."

He said arsenicosis causes malonosis — a term used to describe soiling of skin surface and mucous membrane. The ultimate result is tissue mutation which may cause cancer, but not in all cases.

"As a matter of fact, arsenicosis starts long before it is actually visible on the skin. It affects other organs of the body before finally appearing on the skin. There is no treatment for See Page 12 Col 8

Dainik Bangla, Times cease publication

Thirty three-year-old Dainik Bangla and 10 years younger Bangladesh Times ceased their publication yesterday, reports UNB.

Dhaka district administration asked for suspending the publication of the two papers run by government-owned Times-Bangla Trust.

An assistant district magistrate sent a notice to this end last night, said journalists and employees of the dailies.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Power lines to the Dainik Bangla and the Bangladesh Times newspapers were cut by Dhaka Electric Supply Authorities (DSEA) at 7:15 pm yesterday preventing publication of the See Page 12 Col 4

Aid Group meet on Tuesday Kibria cautions against dramatic expectation

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria yesterday cautioned against a dramatic expectation from the coming Aid Group meeting in Dhaka because of the changed circumstances in the world aid scenario, reports UNB.

"The equations, based on which the developed countries and donor agencies made commitments earlier, exist no more," he told newsmen in the afternoon. "We are hoping to maintain a steady level this year."

Taking part in a discussion with members of Economic Reporters Forum (ERF) ahead of the Aid Club meeting, the fi-

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Consensus must to solve economic problems: Saifur

Speakers at a roundtable here yesterday stressed the need for good governance, political consensus and appropriate policy making for economic development, reports UNB.

They observed that priority development programmes and their rapid and timely implementation are necessary for achieving the target of poverty alleviation.

The Centre for Research and Analysis organised the roundtable on Bangladesh Economy: Problems and Prospects at the VIP lounge of the Jatiya Press Club.

Former finance minister M Saifur Rahman said success of everything in the economy depends on the quality of the governance that is vital for development.

He stressed the need for a political consensus to find out common grounds for working to resolve the economic problems in order to prepare for the next century.

"But there is a divide in the nation and unless we bridge the division in the political arena, we'll not be able to build a prosperous country for our next generation."

Saifur called for shunning See Page 12 Col 7

KCC, RCC mayors urge TV to telecast their interviews 'correctly'

From Staff Correspondent KHULNA, Nov 1: The mayors of Khulna and Rajshahi City Corporations have urged the BTV authorities to telecast their interviews correctly without any political motive.

They alleged that the interview earlier taken for BTV by Abed Khan was wrongly presented on October 28.

Condemning the interviewer's 'political motive', the two mayors observed 'none had any right to put the neutrality of BTV on question mark by twisting the truth.'

In a joint press conference at Khulna Press Club this evening, Mayor of Khulna Sk Tayebur Rahman and Mayor of Rajshahi Mizanur Rahman Minu bitterly criticised all the policies of the See Page 12 Col 5

Great News for Parents ! !

Hurco International School, which imparts quality education, announces with great pleasure that no admission fees or any fees other than monthly tuition fees will be charged from the first 50 students to be admitted for the academic year 1998. This facility is available on first come first serve basis. Admission is going on and you can avail of this opportunity provided you are on time.

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Tea growers make a windfall as global output falls

From Nurul Alam

"Earlier, from 1983 to '96, we did not see such a good price in the auction markets while most of the tea producers had to reach the break-even point somehow or struggle for survival," Qamrul said. He said the "extra money" made by tea growers would naturally help them go for fresh investment in their gardens to raise the quality of yields, as tea is a long-term capital intensive sector.

"During the past few years, some tea growers even incurred losses as cost of production was high, rising beyond Tk 50 per kg," said Qamrul who is also General Manager of the British owned James Finlay company, having 21 tea gardens in Bangladesh.

Chairman of state-owned Bangladesh Tea Board, Brig (Ret) Mokbul Haider said, "The tea producers really earned good profit this time and I wish the surplus money will be utilized by them in the field and in the factory to improve quality and production."

"However, it is a very good sign for our tea industries," See Page 12 Col 6

Rebels kill 10 in Manipur

NEW DELHI, Nov 1: Rebels in India's remote, fractious north-east ambushed a convoy of soldiers today and killed 10 in a shootout that lasted an hour, a news agency reported, says AP.

Press Trust of India, quoting unnamed government officials, said the attack took place near the Manipur state capital of Imphal, 1,800 kilometers (1,000 miles) east of New Delhi.

The sources could not say whether any militants had been hurt. The attackers escaped into the jungles before government reinforcements reached the site.