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Damaged gas line yet to be repaired

By Staff Correspondent

The Titas Gas authorities failed to engage Fire Brigade divers yesterday to repair the damaged under-water 12-inch diameter gas pipeline in Turag river below Mirpur bridge.

"It was not possible for us to arrange Fire Brigade divers because of holiday. They declined to work on holiday," a Titas Gas official said.

The damaged pipeline continued to emit gas, creating enormous bubbles at the spot. Many mechanised and non-mechanised boats were seen passing close to the troubled spot.

No guard was found at the site during a visit to the spot by this correspondent yesterday afternoon.

The Titas Gas authorities which earlier sought the Navy's help in repairing the damage will hold the second round of talks at the Naval headquarters on Sunday, sources said.

Divers on Thursday identified the damaged section of the pipeline. They found that the safety concrete coating on the 50-pound pressure pipeline was severely damaged when it was hit by a mechanised boat on Wednesday. It is one of the main supply lines of gas for the capital's western part including Mirpur and Mohammadpur areas.

The Titas Gas is considering sending vigilance teams to inspect gas pipelines, specially those under water and under bridges in the city, its Managing Director Sekendar Hayat told The Daily Star yesterday. A committee will be formed to investigate the incident under Turag river, he said.

One killed, 5 hurt as AL-BNP clash in Sujanagar

PABNA, Dec 25: An old man was killed and five others were injured in a clash between the supporters of Awami League and BNP at Tatibandh village in Sujanagar thana today, reports UNB.

The clash took place after two weeks of the by-election in Pabna-2 constituency.

The dead was identified as Mobarak Molla, 80, of the village. All the injured — Quddus Molla, 47, Binot Molla, 36, Jotijan, 35, Abdul Molla, 45, and Judu Molla, 38, were admitted to Pabna General Hospital.

Local people said the clash between the two groups erupted at about 5 pm.

Local BNP alleged that the AL supporters attacked them due to political rivalry centring the by-election.

However, Awami League denied BNP allegation.

Mizan reinstated

Jatiya Party leader Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury has been reinstated as Vice Chairman of the party, reports UNB.

JP Chairman H M Ershad reinstated the elderly leader of the party in all his posts, including the Member of the party Presidium and Vice Chairman of the central working committee, said a press release.

Meanwhile, a presidium meeting of the party will be held at chairman's office at Baridhara in the city at 11 am today.

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7 27 5-14 5-23

8 28 5-15 5-24

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Feeling the bite

Mercury fell down to 11.4 degree Celsius in the city yesterday, the lowest so far this winter, giving people a feel of cold.

— Star photo by Enamul Huq

Benu says he and Khaleque joined AL voluntarily

Ward Commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation Ismail Hossain Benu who also joined the ruling party along with S A Khaleque on Thursday said they both did it voluntarily, reports UNB.

"Khaleque and I joined Bangladesh Awami League willingly and it was a result of our three months' efforts," Benu, a BNP leader and ward commissioner of Mirpur area, told newsmen yesterday amid a wave of controversies over his colleague's latest political turn-about.

He narrated the backdrop of their joining Awami League at a press conference at a community centre at Pallabi.

The press conference followed a riddle that city BNP leader S A Khaleque joined Awami League offering flowers to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and then described the joining as an act "coerced by DGF", making a dramatic appearance at an *iftar* party hosted by BNP chairperson Be-

rum Khaleda Zia the same evening.

Khaleque made the volte face being frustrated for not getting any hopes from the Prime Minister about his future status in the party, Benu said. "Besides, continued pressure from BNP also made him deny joining Awami League," the ward commissioner told reporters.

Benu said on December 24, he boarded the Nishan Patrol car of Kamal Ahmed Majumder MP and went to the residence of Khaleque. He changed his dress keeping us in his drawing room.

"Later, we all together moved towards the Prime Minister's office in the MP's car. No other person was there, bar its driver."

On the way, he said, the two bought two bouquets from the roadside and joined the Awami League in a "cordial atmosphere".

At the press conference local Awami League leaders and his supporters were present.

The Director-General of Forces Intelligence has rebutted the news implicating the agency in BNP leader S A Khaleque's contentious joining of the rul-

ing ceremony over, they left the Prime Minister office with the local MP and Khaleque got down at his residence.

But in the evening, Khaleque's "embarrassing and confusing statement puzzled us all," he added.

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Poor handling of Sangu gasfield

Petrobangla dissatisfied at Cairn's performance

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla is dissatisfied at British oil company Cairn's handling of the off-shore Sangu gasfield which suspended supply more than 16 times in the last six months.

Due to Cairn's poor performance at the fully automated gasfield, Petrobangla is also refusing to allow it to begin full-scale production of 160 million cubic feet per day (mmcf/d) from Sangu, sources said.

For the last two of months, Cairn has been requesting Petrobangla to allow full production from January. It was producing 60 mmcf/d till Wednesday.

Considering the gas crisis in the city due to a damage in the Titas pipeline and declining gas production at Bakhrabad, Petrobangla has now allowed Cairn to enhance gas supply from Sangu to 105 mmcf/d.

saying that such frequent disruptions were unheard of in any other gasfield in the country.

Petrobangla told Cairn that it would not allow extraction of more than 30 mmcf/d from each of the four wells. "Over extraction could deplete Sangu gas reserves fast and the damage could be irrecoverable," said an official citing the example of Bakhrabad gasfield.

Another source pointed out that due to shortage of foreign exchange, the government was discouraging enhanced gas supply from Cairn right now. It has to pay Cairn in dollars on a monthly basis.

Sources said that in a recent Joint Review Committee meeting between Petrobangla and Cairn, the government expressed its dissatisfaction at the poor performance of Sangu

and the lack of proper handling of the gasfield.

Since gas production at Sangu started in July this year, supply was repeatedly disrupted due to technical and unexplained reasons. Sometimes, Cairn stopped gas supply to the national grid at Chittagong city gate for eight hours and even for a whole day.

"Definitely something is terribly wrong somewhere in the Sangu system," said one source. "None of the other gasfields had ever suspended gas production so frequently as Sangu did. But, of course, this is the country's first and only offshore gasfield and we don't know much about such a gasfield."

Another source said one of the main flaws in the Sangu

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gasfield is the lack of proper handling of the gasfield.

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We want to ensure religious rights of all: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government wants to build a society where there will be no discrimination and every one will enjoy their due rights, reports UNB.

"We want such a society where nobody will snatch the rights of others and will work only imbued with patriotism ... we want everyone to live with full religious rights," she said.

Hasina was talking to the members of Christian community who gathered on the green lawn of the PM's official residence on the occasion of holy Christmas.

Christians of all ages — young and old, men and women — joined the function at Ganobhaban premises at the invitation of the Prime Minister.

At the beginning of the function in the afternoon, a group of little boys and girls presented Christmas Carol and exchanged greetings with the Prime Minister.

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He said there are now two

Gunbattle in Sundarbans leaves 4 pirates dead

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 25: Fierce gunbattle between two rival groups of pirates in the Sundarbans Wednesday afternoon left at least four dead and 25 injured.

Two of the injured — Fazlul Huq, 30, and Bikash Pande, 32, — were handed over to Shyamnagar thana police on Thursday noon. They were found lying on the bank of the Mahananda canal with severe bullet injuries.

According to police and eyewitnesses, both the groups were locked in gunfight for about four hours in the canal of Mahananda near Raimangal river.

Kawser Ali, a boatman and the two injured pirates now in custody told police that the gunbattle took place between the 'Kalu Bahini' of the Sundarbans and the 'Kiron Bahini' of Shyamnagar border area over sharing of extorted money, looted goods and poached tiger and deer.

Shyamnagar thana police today went to the spot to recover the bodies.

Bikash Pande, one of the two

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injured rounded up from Mahananda canal is an Indian national by birth. Police quoting Pande said pirates of Kiron Bahini took away two mechanised trawlers, firearms and ammunition of Kalu Bahini.

The pirates coming from across the border often create reign of terror in the Sundarbans and loot money, belongings of 'Bawals' and fishermen, said an official of the Sundarbans Forest Division.

AL activist shot dead

JESSORE, Dec 25: A former UP member and an activist of the ruling Awami League was stabbed and then shot dead by unidentified assailants at Raghunathpur village in Sarsha thana of the district on Thursday, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said Nurul Islam, 45, former member of Bahadurpur UP, came under attack while he was going to Benapole Bazar at 2 pm.

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forest to deliver the helpless baby which was still wailing for its mother.

The guards had let the baby elephant wait and cry for her mother at the water hole for two days, hoping she would return to pick her up.

Nurjahan, a British trained vet said the baby elephant might have滑下 a hill during a retreat by a herd of elephants which included her mother.

The herd was fleeing a mob which hurled home-made bombs, beat empty kerosene tins and fired gun shots to drive away from paddy fields, reports reaching Cox's Bazar had said earlier.

She weighed only 65 kg when she arrived at the zoo, emaciated, sick with diarrhoea and traumatised after a long journey in a pick-up van on October 24.

She picked her up at Ramu after forest guards and zoo officials brought her walking down the

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