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'Confrontational politics is a war against commonman'

By Staff Correspondent
The confrontational politics is a 'war' against the commonman that is crippling businesses in the country, says the president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries.
Abdul Awal Minto said the country is caught in the claws of two political rivals and nobody would invest until peace prevailed and governance improved.
The politics of destruction is killing all of us', said Minto. The country urgently needs to establish an environment conducive to investment, wealth and job creation by the private sector by speeding up administrative and judicial reforms, and privatisation, he added.
Minto said hartals, mugging, *mastans* and extortion must be eliminated to ensure a peaceful business environment, while government services, See page 11 col 7

'Consensus a must for high growth rate'

By Staff Correspondent
President of Dhaka Chamber Commerce and Industry Aftabul Islam has said confrontational politics and terrorism are seriously threatening the country's prospects of achieving a high growth rate. Bangladesh has to achieve and sustain a nine per cent growth rate for the next 10 years to achieve the status of a middle income group country, he said.
"But to achieve it, political consensus is a must and the government has to take the leading role for a meaningful dialogue with the Opposition."
The DCCI President identified some other problems hindering investment in the country. These include high lending rates, lack of protection against dumping and smuggling of foreign products and different non-tariff barriers put up by other countries.
To fight the increasing criminal activities which are badly affecting business, Aftab said, there must be a special mobile police force under a magistrate. Noting that the police-to-population ratio in the country is one of the lowest in the world, the DCCI President suggested that unemployed graduates be recruited in the police force. He also suggested setting up of a central traffic management centre involving government agencies and private sector.

'Punish those who block decisions on development'

By Staff Correspondent
Government officials who block decisions on development should be punished, says the president of the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
"Government officials must understand that they are not the masters, but they are there to serve the people," said Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan.
Bhuiyan underscored the need for strict measures to improve law and order and ensure political stability. The politicians must understand that Bangladesh is losing market because of these problems, said Bhuiyan.
Bhuiyan said the government must also create 2.5 million jobs annually to cope with the growing unemployment rate.
"It costs about Tk 50,000 to create one job," said Bhuiyan. "Bangladesh has to invest Tk See page 12 col 8

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by Sarwat Siraj
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Prayer Timings
February 13

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-15
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	5-58	6-00
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Terrorism, political unrest worry business leaders

No prospect of new investment until situation improves, The Daily Star Roundtable told

By Staff Correspondent
The leaders of the country's top chamber bodies yesterday expressed in unison their extreme concern over the prevailing law and order situation and confrontational politics and observed that entrepreneurs would not go for fresh investment unless the situation improved.
Venting their frustration over the state of politics, they said if the situation continues much longer, this will virtually kill prospect of new investment and incapacitate the existing ones. This would lead to further terrorism and political unrest as the situation would cause further unemployment, they noted.
The business leaders were speaking at a Roundtable titled 'Employment generation, private sector development and economic challenges facing Bangladesh' organised by The Daily Star in cooperation with the FBCCI, MCCI, DCCI and FICCI at a city hotel. Executive Vice President of IFC (International Finance Corporation) Peter Woicke was a guest speaker. Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the discussions.
The entrepreneurs also felt that as a short-term step to improve investment environment, the government must improve governance, solve the problems at Chittagong and Mongla ports, establish the rule of law, streamline the financial sector and help open up the regional markets for the country's manufacturers.
They observed that the government needs to follow a well-defined investment policy to create new jobs. The present economic growth rate is too insignificant to absorb the three million new entrants to the job market every year. These educated unemployed youths are creating the law and order situation which is harming investment.
FBCCI President Abdul Awal Minto termed the present confrontational politics as a 'war' against the commonman and said the nation is now caught between the claws of two rival political parties.
"Unless the situation changes, the business environment is bleak," he said. See page 12 Col 1



The Daily Star roundtable in progress at Sheraton Hotel yesterday. — Star photo

Sumon murder: CID starts investigation

By Staff Correspondent
The Central Intelligence Department (CID) has started to investigate the murder of Ahmed Hossain Sumon who was allegedly killed by the detective branch (DB) of police in his own house during a pre-dawn raid on Wednesday last, police sources said yesterday.
The family of Sumon will file a case against the 24 DB men on charges of killing Sumon and injuring two others with bullets during a DB raid on their Karimullah Bagh residence at In Shyamur.
The IG Police, AYBI Siddiqui, passed on the instructions following a meeting with his top officials at the Police Headquarters yesterday. The IG had asked the CID chief to investigate into the incident and submit a report on it at the earliest.
Sumon's elder brother, Shamim Hossain, and his niece Tuli, were also shot during the DB raid early Wednesday.
The DB men were accompanied by local masked miscreants, members of the family alleged.
Meanwhile, Sumon's *Qukhvani* was held in his residence in the city yesterday afternoon. Condition of Hossain and Tuli were improving at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, members of the family said.
The areas adjacent to the residence of the victim remained tense for the third consecutive day yesterday, witnesses said adding that some processions were also brought out during the day.

Opposition's joint rally today

By Special Correspondent
The BNP-led opposition alliance will stage a joint rally at Paltan Maidan in the city at 3 pm today.
The chiefs of four opposition parties — BNP, JP, Jamaat and Jatiya Party — will address the rally from a dais for the first time since their summit in November 30, opposition sources said.
BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is expected to announce fresh action programmes like 36-hour blockade hartal from February 16.
The meeting over the leaders of the four opposition parties will lead their respective party procession in a renewed attempt to stoke their campaign to force the government to withdraw the controversial Public Safety Act (PSA) and resign to pave the way for fresh elections.
The processions of the four parties will proceed one by one. BNP procession led by party Chairperson Khaleda Zia will first start from Paltan Maidan while that of JP led by Ershad, Jamaat led by Golam Azam and IOJ led by Azizul Haq will follow.
The anti-government campaign received a new impetus after the government tabled the controversial PSA on January 30 in the absence of the main opposition MPs who had been staying off parliament's session since June last year.
The bill which still awaits Presidential seal of approval has provided enough ammunition to the opposition to build their anti-government campaign, saying the PSA denying bail to an accused would be used against the opponents of the government, a charge the government leaders have denied. They argued it is meant for arresting a growing curve of See page 11 col 6

'Corruption hindering investment'

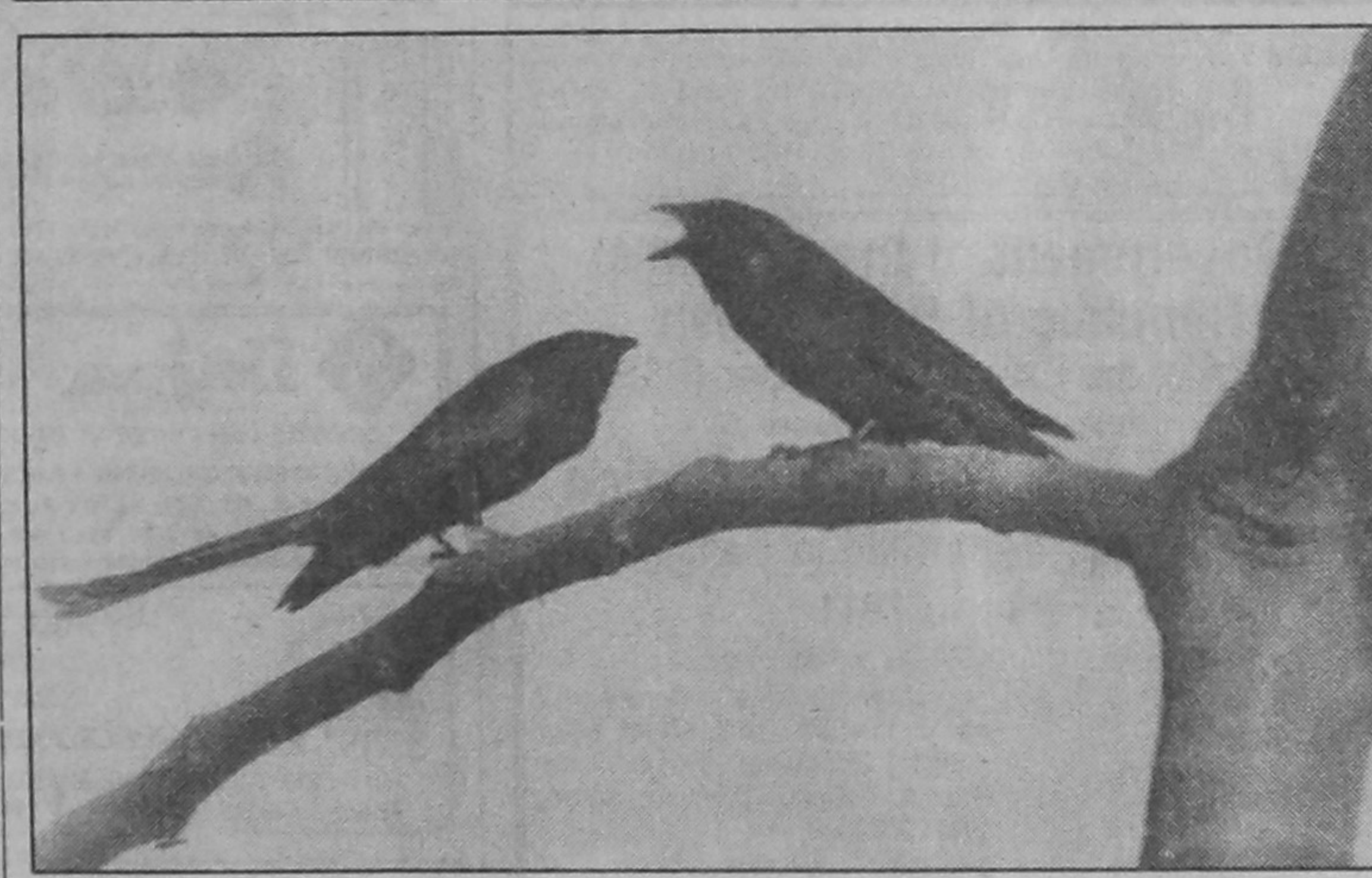
By Staff Correspondent
President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Latifur Rahman has said problems like confrontational politics, low level of governance, poverty, financial mismanagement, lack of investment in manufacturing sector, limited size of market and poor infrastructure are seriously hindering business in the country.
He said that to eradicate poverty, employment opportunities have to be generated and this is possible only through further investment. "But investment is hindered due to corruption in governance. Investors will not come if there is no quality governance. And ours is not an investment friendly governance."
The MCCI President said the banking sector is in absolute mess. Repayment problems in the sector are affecting every one badly. "We here about huge See page 12 Col 1

Public Safety Bill President put to test as time runs out

by Nurul Kabir
By all indications, the controversial Public Safety (Special Provisions) Bill has isolated the ruling Awami League from all other political parties and put the President to a test if he is ready to assent to it, ignoring concern of the entire Opposition and the civil society at large.
Things took a more sensitive turn on Thursday when three eminent jurists, including one who publicly expresses sympathy for the ruling party, submitted a memorandum to the President, advising that he should seek the Supreme Court's opinion on certain legal issues involved in the Bill before assenting to it or not doing so.
All concerned are looking forward to seeing what President Shahabuddin Ahmed is going to do as regards the controversial Bill. He is now left with only a day to take a decision.
The Bill was passed by the Jatiya Sangsad on January 30 with the Opposition Bench empty. It was reportedly sent to the President the same day, with the Speaker putting his signature on it as a Money Bill. The President is supposed to assent or not to assent to the Bill in 15 days from the date of presenting it before him. So, tomorrow is the last day.
However, if the President goes by the jurists' suggestion and refer it to the SC for opinion, there are ample indications that he has to risk his present relation with the government of Sheikh Hasina. Contrary to the government, the jurists have claimed that the Bill is not a Money Bill.
The President's silence over the issue seems to have already soured his relation with the government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina usually meets the President on her return from a foreign visit. But this time, she is yet to meet him although she returned from Belgium on February 5 last.
However, the controversial Bill passed in an unusual haste provides for summary trial for certain categories of crime in the special tribunals, recognising those as non-bailable offences. See page 11 col 7

Diplomats make no comments on SPA

By Special Correspondent
Foreign diplomats based in Dhaka did not comment on the enactment of the Public Safety Act, as was reported in a section of the press, it was learnt yesterday.
Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad explained various provisions of the Public Safety Act (PSA) and the imperatives that led to its enactments at a briefing of foreign diplomats on Thursday in Dhaka.
Azad was quoted by a news agency to have said "Oh yes, they the diplomats all supported and appreciated the law."
Several sources said the diplomats present at the briefing did not say anything appreciating the new law. In fact, none of them made any comment.
One of the envoys asked if an English version of the bill was available, which was not. He requested for an English translation.
No amendment to Public Safety Bill: Khasru
Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru yesterday ruled out the possibility of any amendment to the Public Safety Bill.
"We are not going to make any amendment to the Bill," he told UNB last night.
Khasru hoped the President, who was also a Chief Justice, would dispose off the matter in accordance with the provision of the Constitution.
About the appeal to the President by some senior lawyers seeking to refer the Bill to the Supreme Court to decide if it was a money bill or not, the Law Minister said it would be of no use. He pointed to Article 106 of the Constitution, and held that after issuance of certificate by the Speaker that it was a money bill as per Article 81 (3) of the Constitution, none including the court can raise any question. See page 12 Col 3



Today is *Pahela Falgoun*: And the cuckoo couple is heralding the advent of the spring. — Star photo by A K M Mohsin

Tullow's first attempt fails

Reju well abandoned and plugged

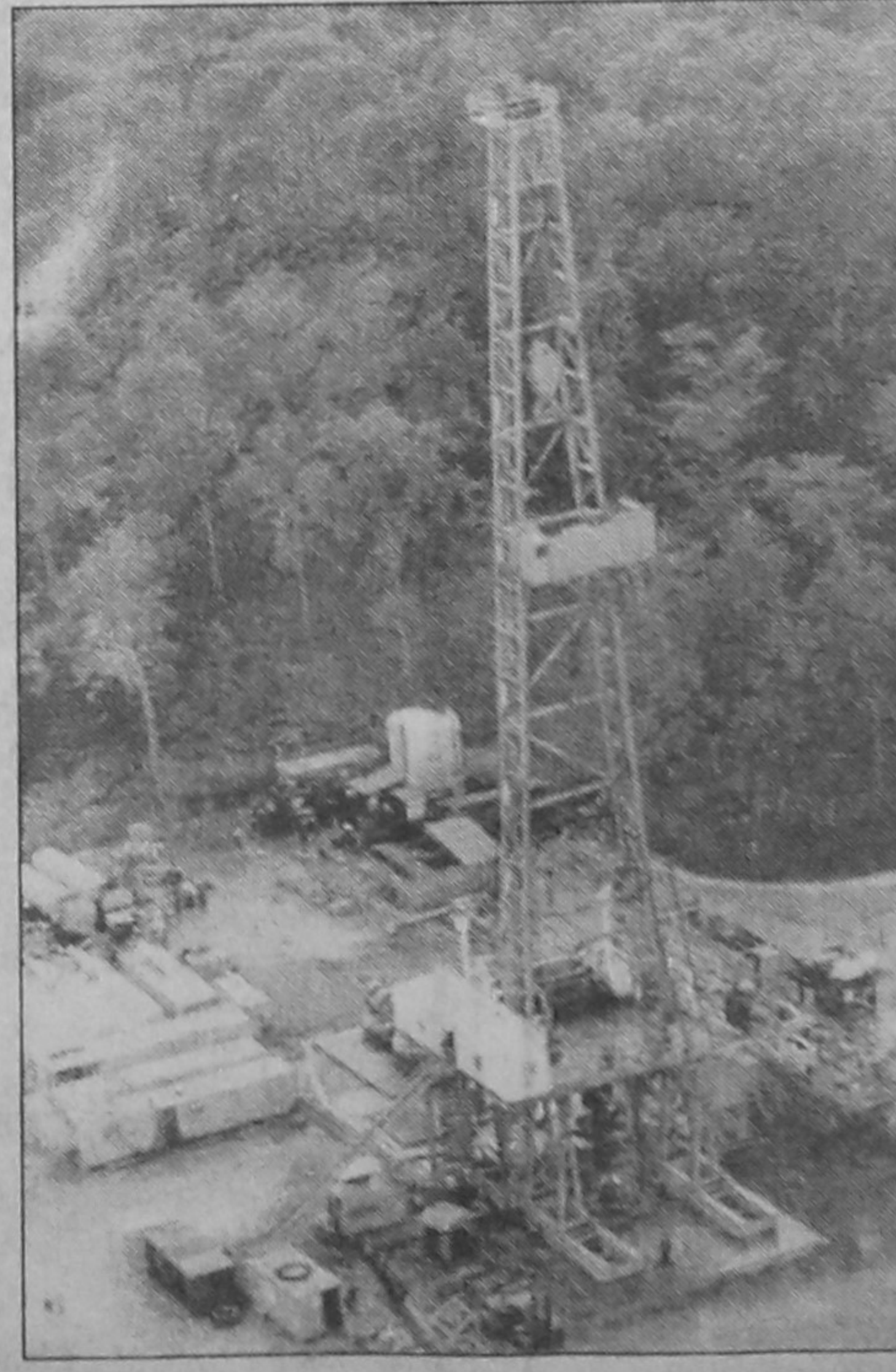
By Sharier Khan
Irish company Tullow's first exploratory gas-oil well drilling at offshore Reju has ended without any 'positive result', sources concerned said.
Tullow, which purchased operatorship of the offshore blocks 17 and 18 from American oil company Okland last year, has abandoned and plugged the Reju well at a depth of 4417 metres.
While drilling, Tullow had found traces of gas at a depth of 1100 metres. But later analysis showed negative results. Tullow was approved a budget of around eight million dollars for the drilling of this exploration well under a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) which outlined the 'most relaxed work programme' for the company compared to other PSCs, the sources pointed out.
The company initially had plans to drill 4,000 metres at Reju in Block 17, some 50 km from the shore. But it went ahead drilling a depth of 4417 metres and finally decided to abandon it.
The failure is a severe blow to the financial health of the small Irish oil company that received a lot of government attention in the Second Round Block Bidding for oil and gas exploration in Bangladesh.
In 1998, Tullow's net loss stood at 17.9 million Irish pounds against a total income of 4.9 million pounds, the source said, adding it was counting on a discovery in the block immediately.
The government has, meanwhile, invited Tullow and American oil giants Chevron and Texaco to have discussions with the Energy Ministry tomorrow over a 'tie-up' for exploring and developing Block 9.
Block 9 is the most coveted block in the second round bidding and a major cause of delay of the bidding process by two years as the government apparently showed its determination to award this block to Tullow despite its financial incapability.
The government apparently preferred Tullow's bid to that of the other companies as it outlined drilling of 10 exploratory wells at a cost of 56 million dollars in the first three years.
A participant in the second round bidding with the tender floated in June 97, Tullow practically entered oil and gas exploration in Bangladesh in 98 by secretly striking a technical See page 12 col 1

Sylhet tense as five-day hartal begins today

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Feb 12: An uneasy calm has been prevailing here over the opposition called five-day hartal beginning at 6 am today.
The opposition alliance earlier called the hartal demanding withdrawal of names of halls and buildings of the Shahjalal University. Besides, the alliance wants removal of VC Prof Habibur Rahman and Dr. Jafar Iqbal, renaming of the halls and buildings after the 360 companions (saints) of Hazrat Shahjalal (R), trial of the killers of the student who was shot dead on December 25 and withdrawal of the cases filed against the opposition activists.
Different organisations including leaders of Sylhet chamber have urged the opposition for reducing the hartal period considering the sufferings of the people.
On the other hand, the district Awami League is planning to organise programmes condemning the activities of the 'anti-liberation forces'. National-level leaders are expected to attend the programmes, said a leader. See page 11 col 7

Another major gasfield discovered

By Staff Correspondent
Unocal Bangladesh Ltd has announced discovery of another major gasfield in Moulvi Bazar. Unocal yesterday said that the Moulvi Bazar #3 (MB 3#) well, located in Block 14, tested at a rate of 72 million cubic feet (mmcf) of dry, clean gas per day. The MB #3 well was drilled to a total depth of 2,400 metres. The primary objectives were the Middle Miocene sandstones of the Lower Boka Bill Formation (BB50-70). The logging programme identified about 31 metres of gas-bearing sand over an interval of 66 metres. The well lies on a vast subsurface geologic anticline structure spanning 13 km in length north to south, and an east to west width of 2 km, said a press release.
The MB #3 test was from perforations between 2295 and 2313 metres while the flowing tubing pressure was 2,219 psi.
The MB #3 is the first well in Bangladesh completed as a 'monobore' well design that was originally developed in the company's Thailand and Indonesia operations. The well was drilled to its total depth in 8 days at a cost of about \$2.6 million.
Unocal and its subsidiaries have previously announced See page 12 Col 4



The site of the gasfield discovered by Unocal in Moulvibazar. — Unocal photo

SKOP strike at Patenga begins today

From Our Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 12: Sramik Karmachary Oikya Parishad (SKOP), Chittagong will begin an indefinite strike by oil tankers and tank lorry workers at Patenga Industrial Area from 6 am tomorrow.
The SKOP, Chittagong as called the strike to realise its eight-point demand including cancellation of the decision to set up pipe line to carry oil in the country, reappointment of Jahuna Oil's CBA leader Fazlur Rahman and withdrawal of showcauses and cases against 15 staffers of the said company, cancellation of the decision to increase price of oil and resolution to calibration problem at different oil installations of the country and problems of workers and staffs of oil sector.
SKOP brought out procession and held rallies in support of tomorrow's strike there today while Bangladesh Noutan Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Sarak Parishad, Sramik Federation and Bangladesh Lighterage Sramik Union in separate statements called upon all concerned to make the strike a success.