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Cabinet okays joint venture with China for laying gas pipeline

Star Report

The Cabinet yesterday approved signing of an agreement with a Chinese-Bangladeshi joint venture for laying a vital gas pipeline from Habiganj to Ashuganj.

Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL) and Petrobangla will now start final negotiations with Summit Daring of China and Summit Industries of Bangladesh for installation of the 54 km 30 inch diameter Habiganj-Ashuganj (HA) gas pipeline.

"We expect to sign the final agreement within one month. Once signed, it will take 10 months to complete the project," said a highly placed source.

The government has been pursuing this pipeline project for over a year now. Due to lack of financing from donors, it had been trying to involve the private sector in the deal while protecting monopoly rights of GTCL.

See page 12 col 5

Major reshuffle in admn

By Special Correspondent

In a major reshuffle in the administration, the government yesterday transferred a number of secretaries in the Ministries of Environment and Forests (MOEF), Food, Industries, Fisheries and Jute and those of the Election Commission and Securities and Exchange Commission.

According to Establishment Ministry sources, Secretary of Statistics Division Manuwar Rashid has been transferred to the Election Commission (EC) as its Secretary.

The Ministry changed the earlier order for transfer of Relief and Disaster Prevention Secretary Azad Rulul Amin to the EC. He remains in the same post.

MOEF Secretary Syed Marghub Murshed replaces Fisheries and Livestock Secretary.

Ayub Quadery, who replaces Food Secretary Mahubul Kabir, Kabir who is suffering from

See page 12 col 7

Mourning day today

The government has decided to observe mourning day today to pay respect to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad who died on Saturday, reports BSS.

The national flag will fly at half-mast in all government, semi-government and autonomous institutions and buildings and in Bangladesh Missions abroad, an official announcement said yesterday.

Inside Today

Article

Two Kinds of Populism

Between Bihar and Mauritius

by Praful Bidwai

Page 4

Focus

Japan's security perceptions; New metres to contain DESA's system loss

Page 5

Business

July-April export earnings fall 4 pc short of target

World oil summit starts in Canada amid violence fears.

Asian policymakers call for action on poverty, graft

Pages 6, 7 & 8

June	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
13		6-17pm
14	5-11 am	

Prayer Timings

June 13	Azhan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	1-00	1-30
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-50	6-55
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Bangladesh Bank directive

Check Taliban-linked bank accounts

By Inam Ahmed

Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked all commercial banks to check whether any organisation directly supporting Afghanistan's Taliban government is operating bank accounts in Bangladesh.

The commercial banks have also been directed to identify if any such organisation is their client and report it to Bangladesh Bank.

The BB sent the letter following a United Nations Security Council letter to the Foreign Ministry that it has informa-

tion that the Taliban are operating 'in this region'.

UNSC also named a few organisations in India which are financially supporting the Afghan war lords. The Council requested Bangladesh to check if such organisations are also operating from here.

The Foreign Minister forwarded the letter to the Finance Ministry which sent it to the BB. But details were not available.

The Taliban issue came to the limelight when US Presi-

dent Bill Clinton cancelled a scheduled visit to the National Memorial at Savar, Gramen Bank and BRAC's micro-credit and education programmes at Jowpara in Dharmra on March 20 for security reasons.

Though full details were not given about cancellation of the US President's trip to these places, there were unconfirmed reports that the Taliban or their followers were preparing to shoot down the helicopters carrying the US President with

See page 12 col 8

Rajuk in trouble with its own lawyers: 3000 cases pending

By Morshed Ali Khan

Rajuk is in trouble on the legal front with over 3,000 cases pending with different courts for years and some of its listed lawyers refusing to cooperate, according to sources.

A top Rajuk official said they have found out that these lawyers in connivance with some Rajuk officials have suppressed for years cases involving valuable public land, unauthorised construction and encroachment.

"I can cite you an instance where one lawyer was charged with 250 court cases and he did not touch a single one and lost many, deliberately though," said the official, requesting anonymity.

Rajuk recently relieved most of the 130 lawyers and engaged a fresh batch of 90 in a bid to revamp its law section. Sources said Rajuk had to retain some

of the previous lawyers since they held 'lots of important files,' which they refused to return.

Under the new measures, each lawyer will be allowed to work on a maximum of 30 cases at a time. Rajuk has also recruited a legal adviser for cases in the High Court. Another legal adviser will only look into cases in the lower courts.

A Rajuk source said in most cases these lawyers, with the help of Rajuk's former law officer, negotiated with the parties and simply kept losing the cases in the courts.

"Nowadays Rajuk is winning up to 80 per cent of all the court cases whereas only a year ago the figure was reverse," said the source.

"These lawyers and the Rajuk's law section are responsible for unplanned urbanisation

to a great extent because in thousands of cases they have not defended their client at all," alleged another Rajuk official.

A listed Rajuk lawyer, however, said it should be Rajuk's responsibility to monitor its own law section. He said the law section has been 'as bad as any of its other sections' because none cared to improve this institution.

"The person or institution who broke the law and was sued by Rajuk would always try to win over the opponent's lawyer and with Rajuk's existing monitoring system the listed lawyer is least accountable to its client," said a Rajuk lawyer.

"If you fail to look after your own house you cannot blame others for your failure," said the lawyer, preferring he not be named.

Two WC ties were fixed: Bacher



United Cricket Board chief, Ali Bacher testifies before the King Commission of Inquiry into cricket match-fixing allegations being held in Cape Town yesterday. AFP photo

CAPE TOWN, June 12: South African cricket boss Ali Bacher made sensational claims today about match-fixing in international cricket, including matches of the 1999 World Cup in England, report agencies.

Bacher told the King Commission of inquiry that he had been told by former Pakistan

Syed Ashraf Hq, general secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, on Monday denied any knowledge of alleged match-fixing in 1999 World Cup. "We do not know or believe it. We played our game and won the match against Pakistan," he said to Reuters.

cricket chief executive Majid Khan that two World Cup matches involving Pakistan, against India and Bangladesh, were "fixed".

Bacher also said he had information from an Indian bookmaker that Pakistani umpire Javed Akhtar was "on the payroll" when he made eight crucial decisions against South

26 charged with Apr 9 attack on Khaleda's motorcade

COX'S BAZAR, June 12: Police charged 26 people in two cases under the Public Safety Act with attacking the motorcade of Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia during her tour here on April 9, reports UNB.

Ramu police yesterday submitted charge sheet in the court. The accused included Golam Kibria, organising secretary of Cox's Bazar district BNP, local BNP MP Advocate Khelequzzaman and his close relations.

Three cases were filed under PSA with Ramu thana separately by three people in connection with the attack. Besides charge sheet in the two cases, police submitted a final report on the other case confirming the offence.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia came to Cox's Bazar on a four-day tour on April 9.

In the afternoon, when she started for Chaokoria from

See page 12 col 3

SSC exams: Body soon to probe cause of low pass percentage

By Staff Correspondent

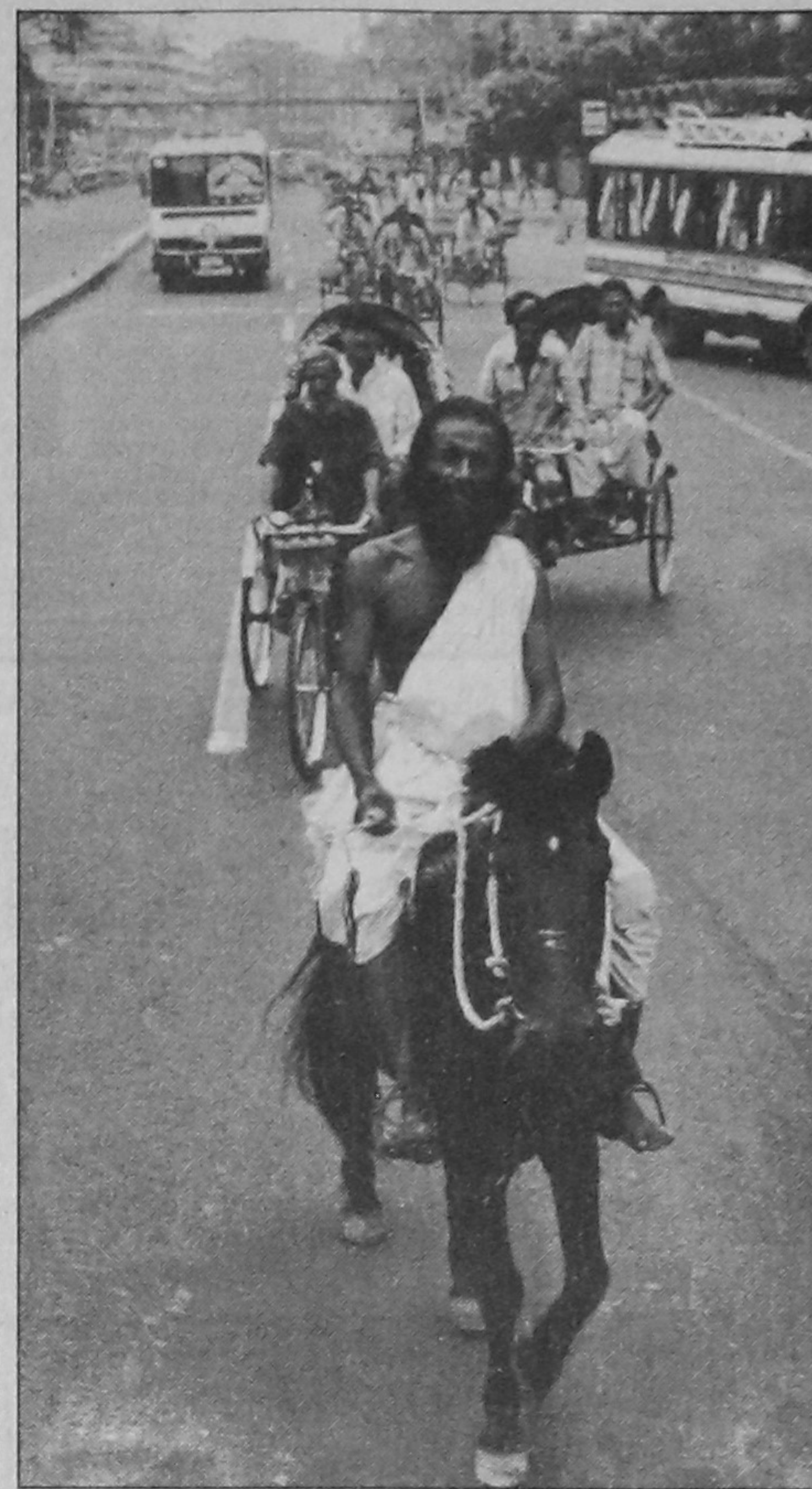
The government will form an independent committee of experts to find out the reasons behind failure of so many students in this year's SSC examinations, Education Minister A.S.H.K. Sadique told the Daily Star last night.

A total of 918,045 students were enrolled under the five education boards, of which 381,762 passed. The pass percentage was 40.36, 15.12 per cent less than the previous year and the lowest in five years.

Sadique said two important causes of failure of so many students can be put down to the fact that question papers were not similar to those given in the

See page 12 col 4

Hartal passes off peacefully



Time for a ride: Mohammed Mustafa, a former BG Press staff, could not think of a better opportunity to go for a horse ride in the city than during yesterday's dawn-to-dusk hartal. —Star photo

By Staff Correspondent

The countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal yesterday called by the BNP-led opposition alliance to protest the proposed national budget for fiscal 2000-2001 passed off by and large peacefully except stray incidents of violence.

In the city, pickets partially damaged some vehicles and set fire to some rickshaws. A few bombs were exploded in some areas but no serious injury was reported.

City BNP President Sadeq Hossain khoka at a post-hartal press briefing claimed that at least 50 of their activists were arrested and more than 30 wounded in attacks by police and terrorists during the hartal.

Police, however, said they arrested only one person on charge of bomb explosion and other criminal offences.

Shops, business establishments, offices and educational institutions in the capital remained closed. Commercial banks were seen open with their main gates closed. Attendance in government offices was less than normal.

Inter-district buses and trucks to and from the city remained off the roads. A small number of minibuses and autos plied on some specific routes. Movement of rickshaws was almost normal.

During the hartal hours, a convoy of over 100 buses, minibuses and microbuses carrying activists of an Islamic group passed through some particular roads in the capital. The bus procession was brought out on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunabi.

Picketing was hardly seen in most areas of the city but the hartal was observed. BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote, Jagga, Democratic League and PNP brought out a number of processions.

BNP brought out processions in Nayapaltan, Mouchak, Shahjahanpur, Sutrapur, Shantinagar, Dhanmudi, Jabbari and Demra areas. The

See page 11 col 7

Press portrayed Jewel as a killer, alleges Kamal Majumder

By Staff Correspondent

Ruling party MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder, father of Jewel, who is an accused in Shipu murder case, is likely to be interrogated by Detective Branch police again today regarding whereabouts of his son, police said yesterday.

Itekhkar Ahmed Shipu, 38, a cellular phone trader at UAE Market at Banani in the city was gunned down by three persons at the market on May 24.

When contacted over phone yesterday, Majumder said he was interrogated by police on Sunday and is likely to be interrogated again today.

"My son is an adult, not a minor boy. Why should I be made responsible for charges brought against him? Why should I be harassed? My house has been raided by police at least ten times in the last few

days. I appeal to human rights bodies to protect me from police atrocities," he said.

Regarding whereabouts of his son, he said, "If I know, I will advise him to surrender to police."

"Why police did not arrest him when he attended the Janaza of the slain businessman?" the MP asked.

Expressing his frustration over police activities and criticising the media for its role, the MP said, "I may quit politics shortly."

He reiterated that his son was with him when the incident was reported to have taken place. The print media was inflating the matter, he alleged.

Majumder said the FIR mentioned that Jewel was seen there (at the spot) along with those

See page 12 col 8

Workers of 4 US factories at CEPZ continue sit-in

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 12: The agitating workers of four towel factories of American company Qualitex Group at Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) continued their sit-in programme for the second consecutive day today, CEPZ sources said.

They began sit-in in front of the factories yesterday demanding reinstatement of 15 terminated workers.

The workers also staged demonstration in front CEPZ's administrative building at 4 pm today, witnesses said.

Meanwhile, senior officials of these factories did not turn up at the office fearing attack by agitating workers, company sources said.

However, police were deployed there to avoid violence.

BGMEA urges govt

Assess impact of US bill on garments sector

By Staff Correspondent

BGMEA has urged the government to conduct a study to assess the impact of a bill passed by US Congress on the country's garments sector.

The recently passed bill allows duty and quota free access of products from sub-Saharan and African countries to the US market.

During a discussion on Sunday, BGMEA leaders also urged Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil to take steps for lobbying so that Bangladesh garments get similar facilities.

The lobbying should be done

See page 12 col 1

Two followers of Charmonai peer beaten up

By Staff Correspondent

Two followers of Charmonai peer were beaten by their rivals at Bijoynagar in the city yesterday, witnesses said.

The victims were identified as Abul Kalam Azad and Mizan. The attackers claimed themselves as followers of Dewanbagh peer, witnesses said.

It was for the third time in the last four days that supporters of the two peers clashed in Paltan area.

Motilheer police said last night that they were not aware of the incident. More than 30 people were injured in clashes between them on Saturday and Friday. Two of them were beaten and injured inside the national mosque Baitul Mukarram.

Assad's banished brother claims himself as legitimate heir

DAMASCUS, June 12: Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's son Bashar faced the first challenge to his right to succeed his father today when his banished uncle Rifaat claimed he was the legitimate heir to the post, reports AFP.

Rifaat al-Assad represents the true legitimacy and is ready to take up his responsibilities at any moment," his spokesman Hafez Khair told the BBC Arabic service monitored in Nicosia.

Rifaat, 63, was stripped of his post of vice-president by his elder brother, who died Saturday, in 1998 and now lives in Europe.

Khair described the Syrian authorities as "ill-advised" and

"incapable of making the right judgement of the situation," and called for "all popular forces to work together to get Syria out of its difficult situation."

Asked about Rifaat's eventual return to Damascus, Khair said he was expecting the Syrian authorities to issue an arrest warrant against him.

The London-based Arab News Network television channel, which belongs to Rifaat's son Sumer, said it would broadcast "a statement by Mr. Rifaat al-Assad, addressing the nation," during the evening.

The London-based Arabic newspaper al-Hayat quoted a senior Syrian official as confirming that Rifaat, who tried



File photo of Rifaat

See page 11 col 7

12 feudal landlords massacred, their villages looted in Bihar

PATNA, India, June 12: At least 12 feudal landlords were massacred and their village looted in caste violence in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, officials said here today, reports AFP.

Some 150 armed men, believed to be landless farmers, raided Asarfi village in Nawada district and gunned down residents in apparent revenge for the murder of five poor farm workers on June 3, district administrator Shivnandan Ram said.

Seven others were seriously injured in the attack that began around 11:30 p.m. (2400 BST) Sunday, Ram said by telephone from Nawada, some 170 km

south of the state capital Patna. Bihar police chief K.A. Jacob said the victims were subjected to extreme brutality.

"The attackers slit the throats of the victims and then pierced their abdomens with sharp-edged weapons during the attack," he said, adding that federal troopers had been deployed to catch the killers.

The gunmen singled out the homes of landlords and damaged or looted property as residents of the besieged village hid behind barricaded doors, other district officials said.

The overnight massacre is the second such attack targeting members of the feudal Bhumiwar community in Nawada

since June 7 when two landlords were slain by local farm tenants in an ongoing caste war, the officials said.

They said the bloodletting in Nawada began on June 3 when five farm labourers belonging to the low-caste Yadav community were murdered in broad daylight by the Bhumiwars, who have set up large private armies in Bihar.

Extreme leftwing Maoist groups have co-opted poor farmers into their private armies which often clash with the powerful landlords in the eastern state, which borders Nepal.

With an annual average of

See page 11 col 8

Niko now wants to sell gas directly to Petrobangla

Revised proposal for joint venture with BAPEX

By Sharier Khan

Canadian oil company Niko Resources has given a revised proposal to the government for signing a joint venture agreement with BAPEX to explore gas in three abandoned fields and sell it to Petrobangla directly as BAPEX's partner instead of selling it through a Production Sharing Contract (PSC), sources concerned said.

Niko has been pursuing a deal for the three gasfields along with BAPEX by remaining outside the block negotiations. However as its proposals did not accommodate the government's rules and regula-

tions, Petrobangla had suggested it to pursue two separate deals — a joint venture agreement with BAPEX and a PSC with Petrobangla.

In order to conclude a speedy deal with the government, the Canadian company now wants to avoid signing of the PSC. At the same time, it is seeking tax relief from the government — an incentive given exclusively

to PSC operators only, the sources pointed out.

In addition, though Niko proposes to become a partner of BAPEX — a subsidiary of Petrobangla — it wants a Gas Purchase and Sales Agreement (GPSA) to ensure sale of gas when the joint venture starts production. GPSA is also applicable to PSC operators only.

Niko has recommended a

price of 1.6 dollars per unit for gas produced by the joint venture — a price equivalent to that asked by the PSC operators in the country. PSC operators typically charge a gas price, under a formula, a minimum of 1.2 dollars or 1.4 dollars and a maximum of 2.4 to 2.7 dollars per unit.

BAPEX is now reviewing the economic rationale behind

Niko's proposals and is likely to submit the review report to Petrobangla board soon.

The sources said that while BAPEX was authorised to bring in a partner by signing a joint venture deal, there was no government policy for signing of a GPSA or waive tax for BAPEX's foreign partner. "In fact, in this case, BAPEX would have to pay Niko's taxes and that makes the

economics of the proposal unattractive," one source noted.

Niko's proposal gives BAPEX 40 per cent share for providing logistics while Niko would bring in the investment. It is understood that once Niko's proposals are accepted, the government would seek matching or better offers from other oil companies through "switch challenge" bidding. If no oil company can match the proposal, the government would sign a deal with Niko.

Niko Resources, which was disqualified by the government

See page 12 col 6