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Peaceful, partially paralysing hartal passes off

Five killed in road mishaps

By Staff Correspondent

The seven-hour countrywide hartal called by the BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday passed off by and large peacefully but partially paralysed life.

The hartal was called to protest police action on a pre-procession rally of the All-Party Action Council in front of BNP central office in the city on Sunday.

At least 10 activists of Jatiya Party were injured, one of them bullet-hit, when a party procession came under attack allegedly by Chhatra League activists at Barisal.

Five persons were killed in four road accidents in the city during the hartal hours.

See page 11 col 7



Skater's ingenuity: Roller-skating being a rare phenomenon on streets of Dhaka catches public attention very easily, and this young creative skater is doing just that using the free road in Kakrail during hartal hours to raise public awareness about prevention of dengue fever. — Star photo

Unocal deeply worried about gas market

Export to India is the best bet, vice-president of the US company tells The Daily Star

By Raffat Binte Rashid From Houston, Texas

US oil company Unocal would scale back its investments in Bangladesh, if the government fails to ensure a market for the Bibiyana field within the next 18 months, a top official of the company said.

Unocal, the largest foreign oil and gas operator in Bangladesh, wants the government to make right policies that would encourage gas export to India, Charles A. Pierce, a vice-president of Unocal, told The Daily Star in an interview at his office in Houston, Texas.

Unocal's primary feasibility study indicates a pipeline to New Delhi market would be the best utilisation of excess gas in Bangladesh and it has a huge market across the coal estates of West Bengal into New Delhi and Bombay, he said.

The market may cease to exist after five years, Pierce warned.

The reasons for and against export are aplenty, especially when 85 per cent of the country still has no access to power.

But Unocal thinks that Bangladesh's gas potential is pinned up because the country's condition is not right to develop industry and use its gas reserve. By exporting gas, Bangladesh can get the hard currency needed to further stimulate investment through infrastructure development.

"The domestic gas market in Bangladesh is primarily for power and domestic fertiliser. Ideally, we would like to sell to the domestic market, but there is no robust market," the Unocal vice-president noted.

Bibiyana is the biggest discovery of Unocal and a world class field with a capacity of four to six trillion cubic feet of natural gas, Pierce said.

"If that field is developed to its fullest potential, it is sufficient to fuel power plants of about 7,000 megawatts for 20 years. Power used in Bangladesh today is about 2,500 Megawatts. Should Bibiyana be developed to its fullest extent, it would almost be two and a half times more than the current electricity needs of the country," he said.

"We have not yet made a proposal to build a pipeline, but after Bibiyana there is sufficient gas to justify submitting a proposal."

"We focused on the domestic market, when we entered. But today with production from Petrobangla's fields, Jalalabad and Sangu, there is an over-capacity to meet the domestic demand growth for the foreseeable future. Today in Jalalabad, without any further investment, we can produce 140 million standard cubic feet per day and if we invest in additional development the field could produce at least 180 mmcf per day. But the government buys only 80mmcf from our Jalalabad field, and around 130 mmcf from Shell's Sangu field. Petrobangla has more capacity."

"We have developed more than enough natural gas to meet existing domestic demand and can develop additional natural gas to meet future domestic demand and still have excess gas to export."

"We are completing our evaluation of several gas utilisation alternatives and our preliminary results indicate that LNG and fertiliser is not viable because of low-cost gas from the Middle East and low-cost fertiliser from the Middle East and other sources."

"Power export from Bangladesh is not practical because the market in nearby West Bengal and Orissa is saturated with coal plants. Also, it is not practical or cost-effective to supply power through long-distance transmission lines to the market in New Delhi or Southern India. We believe that if a pipeline is built to export gas to India, it will have the maximum impact on the country's economy," said Pierce.

Inside Today

Article

Israeli Govt in Deep Crisis: Peace Talks Face Uncertainty

Column: Spotlight on Middle East

By Muslehuddin Ahmad

Page 4

Joint survey finds SKS encroaching

200 more installations served BIWTA ultimatum

By Staff Correspondent

Entire installation of the Sena Kalyan Sangstha at Shyampur near Postgola in the city is encroaching on the river Buriganga's foreshore, according to the result of a joint survey conducted recently by the SKS and the BIWTA.

However, according to sources, the Sena Kalyan Sangstha (SKS) has so far refused to sign the survey report claiming that the 2.5 acres of "land" reclaimed by dumping of 2.5 million feet of earth, belongs to them by the right of a Cadastral Survey (CS) document.

But sources said that the SKS could only produce a document of the land based on the Revenue Survey. The survey was declared "null and void" several years ago due to its "vagueness and lack of transparency".

The SKS is now supposed to sign the survey report. However, if it produces the CS document, a legal battle may start with the BIWTA.

Sources in the BIWTA say that in their map and other documents the SKS installation at Shyampur was classified as foreshore.

The foreshore was clearly defined in the map that covers an area of 17 kilometres on both sides of the Buriganga between Kholamura and Fatulla. The demarcation was incorporated in the Port Act, 1908 and, according to Port Rules, 1966, anyone willing to use the foreshore must obtain permission from the BIWTA.

The SKS should accept all responsibility of the encroachment and remove the obstacles from the river immediately, said a source. The SKS Managing Director could not be reached for his comments.

Meanwhile, the BIWTA has served a 30-day ultimatum to more than 200 small and large encroachers of the river Buriganga to remove all structures from the river or face tough consequences.

See page 11 col 8

Contempt case against PM

Pro-opposition lawyers start signature campaign

By Special Correspondent

A move to initiate a contempt petition against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her recent remarks on the judiciary was taken up yesterday.

Pro-opposition lawyers, who plan to gather up to 300 signatures on a Vokalatnama to file a contempt petition on Sunday, have initiated the move, sources said.

A former secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association has reportedly initiated the signature collection drive. More than 150 signatures were collected till 2 p.m. yesterday, they said.

They said the pro-opposition lawyers, who staged a protest march on Monday against the premier's remarks and demanded that she apologise, have been actively considering filing the petition.

The signature collection is part of that move, the sources said. Barrister Najmul Huda, a

See page 11 col 6

Vajpayee voices concern over plot to kill PM

Dhaka, Delhi to intensify co-operation to combat terrorism

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Aug 8: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has voiced deep concern over the recent attempt on the life of Bangladesh Premier Sheikh Hasina Wajed at Gopalganj as the two countries agreed to intensify cooperation to combat terrorism.

Vajpayee conveyed his concern to Hasina's special envoy and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami when the latter called on him here last evening, diplomatic sources said today.

The Indian Prime Minister said he felt relieved that no harm was caused to Hasina because of timely detection of the explosive device.

Issues relating to security and maintenance of peace on Indo-Bangladesh border came up for discussion during the 40-minute between Vajpayee and Sami, the sources said.

The Bangladesh envoy handed over to Vajpayee a letter from Hasina which is understood to have conveyed the need to activate South Asian regional cooperation. But there was no specific proposal by the Bangladesh Prime Minister in this regard, said the sources.

Before his meeting with Vajpayee, Sami held wide-ranging talks with Indian Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh during which the two sides shared the concern over the threat posed by terrorism to democracy and stressed on the need to boost co-operation to fight the menace.

It was also decided at the meeting between the two Foreign Secretaries that two countries would take steps for expediting the introduction of the

See page 11 col 8

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Hizbul withdraws ceasefire

India blasted for refusal to involve Pakistan in Kashmir talks

ISLAMABAD, Aug 8 : Major Kashmiri militant group the Hizbul Mujahideen today called off its ceasefire and directed its field commanders to resume fighting against Indian forces, reports AFP.

The decision was announced after the expiry of a deadline for India to respond to Hizbul's demand for unconditional, tripartite talks including the Kashmiris and Pakistan.

"We direct all the commanders with the Mujahideen in the field to break the ceasefire and go ahead with all target oriented missions," Hizbul supreme commander Syed Salahuddin said.

The Indian leadership has failed to respond to our ice-breaking move which could have become productive and meaningful," Hizbul, a mostly indigenous

Kashmiri separatist group, surprised India on July 24 when it declared a three-month ceasefire and called for peace talks over the future of the divided Himalayan state.

The move was seen as a major breakthrough in efforts to bring peace to Kashmir, where a Muslim separatist rebellion in the Indian zone of control has killed some 25,000 people since 1989.

But New Delhi has refused to allow Pakistan a place at the proposed peace dialogue and says the outcome of any talks must be within the bounds of the Indian constitution, which sees Kashmir as a part of India.

Another report from Muzaffarabad says, Kashmiri guerrilla outfits today said their "jihad" against Indian rule in the divided territory would gain momentum following the end of the powerful Hizbul Mujahideen's ceasefire.

"It makes us very happy," a top leader of Lashker-i-Toiba, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, told AFP in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

"Our Jihad (holy war) in Kashmir will gain further momentum after this good move by Hizbul Mujahideen."

Hizbul supreme leader Syed Salahuddin announced the end of the ceasefire earlier Tuesday, saying India had failed to agree to demands for unconditional three-way peace talks involving Pakistan.

A spokesman for Al-Badar Mujahideen said the Hizbul "has averted a serious threat" to the Kashmiri struggle and "exposed India's intransigence to the international community."

See page 11 col 7

SAFE for common rules on cross-border stock trade

Two-day conference begins in Karachi tomorrow

By M Shamsur Rahman

A two-day conference of the South Asian Federation of Stock Exchanges (SAFE) begins in Karachi tomorrow with an aim to formulate common regulations concerning cross-border listing and trading of securities in the region.

The conference will be the third of its kind since the inception of the federation. Twelve member bourses of the region including the Dhaka and Chittagong Stock Exchanges are expected to participate in the conference hosted by Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE). Financial markets of Mauritius and Dubai will attend it as observers.

The other member bourses are: Calcutta Stock Exchange, Colombo Stock Exchange, Delhi Stock Exchange, Islamabad Stock Exchange, Karachi Stock Exchange, Lahore Stock Exchange, National Stock Exchange of India, Nepal Stock Exchange, OTC Exchange of India, The Stock Exchange of Mumbai.

The main agenda of the Karachi conference will be to discuss the progress of comparative study of regulations which will be presented before the members in view of their prospective engagement in cross-border trading, said SAFE President Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury MP, also the president of Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

The CSE president and Hiran Mendis, Director General of Colombo Stock Exchange, were elected first president and vice-chairman of SAFE for a two-year term.

Finance Minister of Pakistan Saikat Aziz will inaugurate the conference, while the chairman of Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan will be there as special guest.

Khosru said cross-border listing and trading of securities could provide the relatively small economies in the region with a good source of financing large-scale industrial projects.

The study is expected to come up with a set of recommendations, which will be forwarded to the policymaking bodies of the member countries for adoption.

See page 11 col 8