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Unocal explains 'ghost' payments

It neither paid the govt nor settled environment ministry's compensation claims

By Sharier Khan

US company Unocal has explained how it paid Tk 332.32 crore in compensation for the Magurghara blow-out and said the payments were neither made to the government nor against the environment ministry's claim of Tk 612 crore.

In a letter to Petrobangla on Wednesday, it also admitted that a chunk of this amount, Tk 134 crore, was actually projected, and not real, payment.

The US company explained that out of the Tk 332.32 crore, about Tk 40 crore was paid to railway authorities, tea estates and local people. Tk 158 crore was spent on remedial measures for the blow-out and Tk 134 crore was projected as 'sacrifice' of profit in case of future gas production from Moulavibazar-2 gas field and the rest was paid to various third party contractors.

An outraged Petrobangla, which rejected Unocal's payment claims, will give a reply to the company's letter warning it not to use such misleading figures in any official or unofficial documents.

Unocal officials, however, verbally apologised to Petrobangla for creating confusion over the compensation issue and said what the company actually meant through its claims was that due to the Magurghara explosion, Unocal had to bear a business loss of Tk 332 crore.

"This is not payment against any of the government's compensation claims," said a source quoting Unocal's top executive in Dhaka.

The US company had surprised the govern-

ment earlier this month by claiming unilaterally that it had paid a total of Tk 332.32 crore as compensation for the blow-out. Petrobangla, which is only aware of payment of a total of Tk 38 crore by the company, sought explanation from Unocal earlier this week.

In its letter, the company said it (or previous operator of the gas field Occidental) spent Tk 158 crore to control gas emission from Magurghara, ensure security, drill a relief well and take environmental actions. Since these expenditures were not cost-recoverable, these should be treated as compensation as per an international standard.

But a Petrobangla source noted, "This cannot be claimed as compensation. A remedial measure is a remedial measure and it was their (Unocal) basic responsibility to tame the fire that caused a huge loss of our resources and potential. Taming the fire did not restore those resources and potential."

Unocal also deducted five per cent from its share of profit of future production from Moulavibazar gas field as per the renewed the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) for Block 12. This PSC was signed in September 1998, eight months after the original PSC for the block had expired due to the US company's failure to fulfil basic commitments. The renewed PSC dictates, in the light of the Magurghara (or Moulavibazar-1 gas field) blow-out, that in case of gas discovery from the same gas structure, Unocal would get five per cent less gas profit share.

Unocal discovered gas in the same struc-



Dangerous development
The Chittagong City Corporation is levelling this hill adjacent to the Foy's Lake for 'development' works, without taking into cognisance that the delicate balance of nature is sacrificed.
- Star photo: Anisur Rahman

22,000 pages of proof on Benazir's corruption?

Former Pak PM misused power to accumulate US\$ 1.5b, claim officials

ISLAMABAD, Oct 26: Pakistan's anti-corruption bureau today said that it has 22,000 pages of proof that former prime minister Benazir Bhutto misused her power to accumulate 1.5 billion dollar, reports AP.

Benazir, who moves between Britain and the United Arab Emirates, was convicted in 1999 in Pakistan in absence of corruption and sentenced to five years in jail and disqualified from politics for seven years. She is appealing.

She also faces five further charges of corruption.

According to Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau whose job is to investigate, arrest and prosecute those suspected of corruption Benazir owns homes in Britain, France and the United States.

Her real estate holdings include a 5 million dollar rambling country estate in Surrey in Britain, a stud farm in Texas, six homes in Florida, and two homes in France.

"As shocking as it may be ... we

PM apprises President of her US visit

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday evening and apprised him of the outcome of her official visit to USA and talks with President Bill Clinton, reports UNB.

She said her talks with the US President covered extradition of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and increased quota and duty-free access of Bangladeshi products to American market.

Besides, cooperation in IT sector, liberalisation of US visa for students and regularisation of the undocumented Bangladeshis in America also came up for discussion during the White House talks.

Maj Huda, Maj Nur killed Bangabandhu: SPP

Special public prosecutor Serajul Haq yesterday said two army officers shot and killed father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the August tragedy, reports UNB.

"Major Bazul Huda and Major Nur Chowdhury killed Bangabandhu by firing from stenguns on the staircase," he submitted before the High Court, narrating the August 15, 1975 incident.

The government-appointed lawyer made his assertions based on the depositions given by prosecution witness Havildar Abdul Quddus in the trial court that has sentenced 15 army officers to death in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

Shortly after the attack, Bangabandhu possibly understood that he would not be spared from the hands of attackers as during the foray he kept shut the doors for a few minutes for prayer, advocate Serajul Haq observed.

Browsing the depositions of prosecution 3 and 4, the lawyer continued vivid account of the August 15, 1975 carnage, making his arguments on a fifth straight day in the death reference case.

Havildar Quddus, who was on security duty from army, was hoisting the flag of the residence of Bangabandhu while bugle playing at 5 pm. He (Quddus) witnessed the killing by his officers who attacked Bangabandhu's home wearing army and black dresses.

The havildar was supposed to stay on duty from 6 am to 6 pm, but why he came to the residence at 5 pm was asked by defence counsel during cross-examination in the trial court.

Quoting from his depositions, the prosecution submitted that Bangabandhu was supposed to go to Dhaka University on August 15 morning and Quddus was directed by his higher authority to go to the residence of

UP chairman assaults journalist

From Our Correspondent
SATKHIRA, Oct 26: A journalist was assaulted allegedly by a UP chairman in Satkhira yesterday evening.

Anisur Rahman, Editor of The Daily 'Satkhirar Chitro' was beaten up by Asadul Haq, a UP chairman in Debhata upazilla and his son Babu at about 7:30 in the evening.

A group of people led by Asadul and his son went to the office of the daily and beat Anis mercilessly.

They also ransacked his office and misbehaved with the staff.

Earlier, the chairman along with his supporters went to Satkhira Press Club and threatened the editor and other journalists.

Seriously injured Anis was admitted to the Satkhira General Hospital with injuries.

Meanwhile, Subash Chowdhury, president of Satkhira Press Club, in a statement condemned the attack on Anisur Rahman and demanded immediate arrest and punishment to the culprits.

PM warns against relief misuse

SATKHIRA, Oct 26: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today urged the Opposition not to do politics with miseries of the flood-hit people, report agencies.

They (Opposition) do not know how to combat a disaster, they know how to do politics, capitalising on people's miseries," she told a public meeting at Satkhira Government Boys High School Ground.

Hasina who came here for the second time in three weeks to review the relief and post-flood rehabilitation programme in the district warned that stern action would be taken against misuse of relief goods.

The Prime Minister urged the people to remain alert against any irregularity in distributing relief goods.

She assured the flood victims that her party and administration would always stand beside them and continue all help to overcome the calamity.

About the relief and rehabilitation programme, she said the government has enough food stock to support the distressed people through VGP cards until the next crops.

Already 2.40 lakh VGF cards have been issued for distribution among 1.11 lakh flood-hit families. Hasina said if a family is bigger with 10 members or above, it would be given two VGF cards.

HSBC to take over Nova Scotia Bank operations

By M Shamsur Rahman
Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) is negotiating with the Canada-based Nova Scotia Bank (NSB) for taking over its operation in Bangladesh.

The NSB started operation in Bangladesh about one and a half years ago.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) sources said the central bank has been informed of the negotiation process.

"We have requested them to

Pandemonium at Supreme Court Bar Assoc meeting

A pandemonium broke out at a requisition meeting of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday over passage of a resolution as regards filing of the contempt petition against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by SCBA President Barrister Mainul Hosen.

Two press releases were issued after the meeting, one praising the SCBA president for filing the contempt petition against the Prime Minister for her recent remarks on the judiciary and the other condemning his action.

The SCBA members were divided on the issue at a requisition meeting of the SCBA on Tuesday also.

One press release signed by Barrister Mainul Hosen said that a resolution adopted at yesterday's praised filing of the contempt petition. "An overwhelming majority supported the resolution by raising hands," the press release said.

It was resolved at the meeting that the contempt petition was filed as per a decision of SCBA Executive Committee. "This meeting commends the (SCBA) President's action," the press release said quoting from the resolution.

The resolution was moved by Khandaker Mahbuddin Ahmed and seconded by Barrister Maudud Ahmed. It was read out by Shahidul Karim Siddique with

Khulna Sadar thana JCD president held

KHULNA, Oct 26: Police arrested the Jatyatabadi Chhatra Dal Sadar thana president from his residence here Wednesday night, reports UNB.

The arrested, Chowdhury Hasanur Rashid Miraj, was wanted in a case. He was produced before the court today and later sent to jail.

Protesting the arrest, JCD brought out a procession and held a meeting in the city.

Another report adds: A leader of Bagerhat District Sramik Dal was arrested from Bagerhat town today on charge of creating obstacle to government work.

Police said Kamal Hossain, former convenor, was arrested following an allegation of hampering work at Bagerhat Settlement Office on Wednesday.

Yet another big haul of razors, wristwatches

Consignment addressed to attaché of an embassy?

By Staff Correspondent
A customs intelligence and investigation team seized shaving razors and wristwatches worth about Tk 3.24 crore from a container at the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Kamalapur in the city yesterday.

The consignment was shipped to Singapore from Dubai. Then it was directed to Chittagong port. The consignment was supposed to be delivered to the Attaché of an embassy in Dhaka with a document describing it as foodstuff, customs officials said without giving details.

The consignment arrived at the ICD on October 10 but none came to claim it.

The customs team led by Joint Director Atiqur Rahman and Deputy Director Hafizur Rahman raided the ICD, opened the 20-feet container and recovered 840 cartons containing 84 lakh pieces of Supermax blade and 21 cartons containing 16, 100 pieces of Citizen wrist watch.

The raid was conducted after obtaining permission from the foreign ministry as it carried a diplomatic tag. None has claimed it so far, officials said.

Officials suspect that those who 'imported' it were alarmed following seizures of three separate 'diplomatic' consignments worth about Tk 7.5 crore, Tk 6.5 crore and Tk 1.75 crore from Gulshan and ICD within a period of about one month.

The three earlier consignments seized by the customs were addressed to the Iraqi and Philippines embassies in Dhaka.

Sources in the customs said that an organised racket is involved in importing contraband with the help of some diplomatic offices.

Earlier, customs seized Benson and Hedges cigarettes, wine, Supermax shaving blades and wristwatches.

Customs officials said that they have information that some more consignments are in the pipeline.

A departmental case was filed in this regard. The seized goods were stored in the government warehouse.

Production at AJM resumes

From Our Correspondent
NARAYANGANJ, Oct 26: Production at Adamjee Jute Mills resumed this morning after 44 hours of work abstention by the workers.

About 5000 workers walked out of the mills on Tuesday demanding arrear wages for the month of September.

Management sources said the agitating workers joined their duties at 6 am today. They were assured of arrear payment by October 31 by the leaders of CBA and the Chairman of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) Lt Col (Retd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, sources added.

General Manager (Administration) said the workers joined their duties and the mill is running in full swing.

Police is, however, patrolling the mills area.

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