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JS body surprised by PM's action

Energy ministry continues to hold on to probe report on Magurchhara blowout

By Nazrul Islam and Sharier Khan

The sub-committee of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Energy was surprised yesterday to learn that the US oil company Unocal has not attending the parliamentary committee meetings at the suggestion of the prime minister.

The sub-committee was formed in October last year to settle the issue of compensation regarding the Magurchhara blowout and to find out the original probe committee report on the incident.

US oil company Unocal (previously Occidental), which is responsible for the Magurchhara blowout, had never appeared before the sub-committee although it was asked to do so several times. The sub-committee served a notice on Petrobangla on December 26 to attend its meeting on January 4 along with representatives from Occidental (presently Unocal).

In yesterday's sub-committee meeting chaired by AB

Tajul Islam, the energy secretary in a letter explained a number of issues including the one as to why Unocal was not attending the sub-committee meeting.

The content of the letter infuriated sub-committee member and Jatiya Party MP A Muquid Khan who walked out of the meeting saying that the prime minister talks about transparency but she never practises it. The other members of the sub-committee, Imran Ahmed and Tajul Islam, both from Awami League, expressed their frustration over the content of the letter.

Energy Secretary M Akmal Hossain in his letter to the sub-committee chairman said the Energy Ministry, which had in its possession the original probe committee report on the causes of the Magurchhara blow-out, has sought the prime minister's approval on whether the report could be given to the sub-committee. "The issue is now being considered by the prime minister," the letter

said.

"The notice asking Occidental representatives to be present at the sub-committee meeting has come to the attention of the prime minister who is in charge of the ministry. She has suggested the foreign company's representatives not to attend the meeting," it added.

The prime minister had also observed that the sub-committee may undertake an investigation into the Magurchhara blowout by gathering information from the officials of Petrobangla and Energy Ministry, the letter said.

Earlier, Unocal puzzled the sub-committee members as well as Petrobangla by claiming in an official document in early October that it had paid a sum of Tk 332.32 crores to

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BNP boycott of parliament to continue

Reply to Speaker's letter soon

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has decided to continue boycott of parliament sessions protesting lack of "congenial atmosphere" in the House.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the party Standing Committee last night to review the Speaker's letter urging the Opposition to join the 21st session beginning on January 11 to resolve two "vital national issues".

The issues are retention of reserved JS seats for women and voting right of expatriate Bangladeshis.

But the meeting decided to reply to the letter from Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury to Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia on Tuesday, meeting sources said.

Instead of returning to parliament, BNP will hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan on January 11 to explain its stance and to launch a "massive oust-government movement".

The sources said, although there is tremendous pressure from within the party to join parliament session, Khaleda Zia, reportedly in the grip of hardliners now, is opposed to it.

The emergency meeting held at the party's Banani office with Khaleda Zia in the chair began at 8:15pm and continued till 10:30pm.

Three senior party leaders and MPs M Morshed Khan, MK Anwar and M Shamsul Islam who are not members of the Standing Committee, also attended the meeting on special invitation from the party

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Megawati due today

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Megawati Soekarnoputri, the vice-president of Indonesia, arrives this morning on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh. She is scheduled to fly in by a special Airbus 330 aircraft of the Garuda Airlines at 8-00 am.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will break the protocol to receive the daughter of the Indonesia's founding father as a mark of

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Megawati Soekarnoputri



Annual ordeal... anxious parents wait outside as their little ones rake their brains for answer in the admission test at a school in the city. - - S t a r



Larma pays "courtesy" call on PM

By Special Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday had an hour-long meeting with Jyotirindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma alias Shantu Larma, Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, at her office.

Both officials and Larma said it was a "courtesy" meeting. Details were not available.

Larma was not accompanied by any of his aides.

This was the fifth meeting between the Prime Minister and the chief of the Regional Council (RC) since signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace agreement on December 2, 1997.

Larma has been persistently accusing the government for not "fully" implementing the peace agreement. The government says the agreement is being implemented gradually but the process is being delayed by Larma's "non-cooperation".

Sources said all the issues on which there has been stalemate were discussed at the meeting.

Larma took up a number of issues including rehabilitation of "internal refugees" in CHT, functioning of the Land Commission, resettlement of "settlers" in areas outside the CHT, preparation of a voter list solely for the CHT with "permanent residents" and withdrawal of army from the hills.

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Arafat, Barak agree to give ME peace another shot

CAIRO, Jan 4: The question of Palestinian refugees and sovereignty over holy sites in Jerusalem appeared the main obstacles to a renewed bid for Middle East peace Thursday, as Israelis and Palestinians prepared for intensive make-or-break negotiations with time fast running out, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, in his first com-

ments since meeting US President Bill Clinton in Washington, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Thursday that "he hopes" to reach a peace accord with Israel before Clinton leaves office on January 20.

Asked by reporters in the Gaza Strip if he hopes to reach a peace agreement during a planned 10 days of intense, US-

sponsored peace talks with Israel, Arafat said: "We hope so, and we hope before Clinton finishes his term as Clinton has promised to exert all of his efforts."

Arab foreign ministers stood firm on both questions after

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JCD leaders to resign en masse if new body not dissolved

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) who oppose the new central committee have decided to resign en masse from the organisation soon if the committee is not dissolved immediately.

"We are determined not to do politics under the leadership of non-students and terrorists... it's better to quit politics. We will not do politics under Pintu and Laltu," said a leader of JCD's Dhaka University.

The dissident leaders and activists said though they have decided to resign from the organisation as a mark of protest against the selection of non-students and terrorists at the helm, they will not allow the new committee led by President

Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and general secretary Shahabuddin Laltu to carry out activities in the educational institutions, including Dhaka University, Jagannath College, BUET, Dhaka Medical College and others important institutions in the city.

Besides, according to them, Pintu and Laltu will also not be able to do politics in the city.

The decision to resign en masse was taken after BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia reportedly on the advice of party hardliners demanded of the dissidents to issue press statement congratulating the new committee and apologise for dissent.

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Intense lobbying for appointment of 7 HC judges

By Special Correspondent

Appointment of at least seven judges in the High Court is not likely when the court opens after vacation on January 7 because of intense lobbying by different groups of lawyers, judicial officials and the office of the Attorney General, according to sources.

The Law Ministry earlier prepared a list of 14 persons. Another name was later included in the list on insistence of a senior lawyer.

But President Shahabuddin Ahmed declined to accept appointment of so many judges at a time due to lack of logistics and budgetary provisions. He

reportedly advised downsizing of the list to seven.

But the ministry found it difficult to comply with the Presidential fiat because of lobbying by different groups.

The pro-government lawyers demanded that most of the posts be filled up from their 'ranks'.

The ministry's list of probable judges also included three Deputy Attorneys General. This led to resignation of DAG Shahabuddin, reportedly because he felt to have been left out, the sources said.

Judicial cadre officials also pressed for filling up the posts

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 5		5.25 pm
Jan 6	6-42 am	
Prayer Timings		
January 5		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-00
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	3-55	4-10
Maghrib	5-33	5-40
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		