

Blow-out probe blown away

JS body members finally decide to drop Magurchhara case

NAZRUL ISLAM

Due to total non-cooperation from the government machinery, members of a parliamentary sub-committee have decided to stop its probe into the 1997 Magurchhara blow-out and the compensation issue.

The members said they took the decision following their last meeting on January 3 in which they came to know that officials of US oil company Unocal were not attending the Sub-Committee meeting with permission from the Prime Minister.

The January 3 meeting also came to know that the Energy Ministry was deliberately delaying hand-over of the original probe report on the blow-out, made by a government body earlier.

They will convey their decision to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources at its meeting today, they said.

The committee may take the final decision on the fate of the sub-committee today, sources close to the committee said.

The sub-committee members are also contemplating meeting the Prime Minister as they believe that some high officials in the government might have 'misguided' her regarding the issue and the activities of the sub-committee.

The sub-committee has been made "inactive" as it is not being provided with necessary information from the ministry and the Petrobangla, they alleged.

"There is no logic to continue such a committee which can't function due to bureaucratic tangles," said one member of the three-member sub-committee, formed in October last year.

He said all the three members will request the committee to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is in charge of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to address the issue.

"The Prime Minister was not properly guided regarding the Magurchhara compensation issue," the member said preferring anonymity.

The sub-committee headed by ruling party lawmaker Capt. (retd) Tajul Islam had sat four times and asked the officials concerned to submit necessary documents, including the copy of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Greetings...

On the auspicious occasion of the 10th anniversary of The Daily Star, we offer to you, our readers and patrons, our sincerest gratitude for the support extended to us throughout our journey so far (see Letter to the Readers). From today onwards, your favourite newspaper will have a completely new look, with a modernised and dynamic layout, incorporating several innovations. These are a few of many to follow.

... and request for understanding

Today's issue brings with it a 100-page four-colour supplement to mark the 10th anniversary of The Daily Star. To accommodate such a huge printing job, we had to close our regular issue earlier than usual. As a result, we were unable to accommodate some of the latest news on national and international affairs. We request your understanding in this matter. Thank you.

Editor

EDITOR'S LETTER TO THE READERS

Celebrating Ten Years of Journalism without fear or favour

Dear Readers, We begin by paying respect to our Founder-Editor, S.M. Ali, whose vision, leadership and commitment gave us the paper whose 10th Anniversary we so proudly celebrate today. Ten years ago we came before you with the promise of being an "Independent Voice", to write without FEAR or FAVOUR, to speak out boldly on national and international issues, to oppose unequivocally whatever was wrong and detrimental to national interest and to promote that which united the nation and helped our march forward towards a future of freedom, dignity and economic prosperity. We have taken public position on every issue of concern to our nation and have stood up for the rights of the people against all sorts of vested interests. This, we have been able to do, because of the unstinting support that we have received from YOU, our readers, advertisers and the general public. This is internal. However the life-blood of a newspaper is its readers. We exist because of them, we grow because of them and we gather strength from them. All this is external. When these internal and external elements mix then we have the makings of a great newspaper. It is this magical mix that we in The Daily Star, in all modesty and humility, try to achieve in our everyday work.

Ours was ten years of journalism with a purpose. The purpose was to uphold the values of our Liberation War, that is to strengthen democracy and the fundamental rights of the people, to bring the fruits of freedom to the doorstep of the ordinary people, to make the press freer, bolder and more responsible. Our objective was to empower the people with the knowledge that freedom is a right and not a gift. To make people realise that whatever flaws a democratic system of government has, can and must be corrected by more democracy and not less of it. We strove to make everyone believe that democracy can never come too early for a people and that no society has ever lost anything by trusting its people with more and more choices. We constantly fought to protect and promote all forms of fundamental rights and opposed, with all our might, any attempt to curtail them. Thus ours had to be, and was, the loudest and the firmest voice against all black laws and their misuse against the citizens.

Ours was ten years of journalism to build the nation. In all our efforts we underscored the virtues of co-operation and consensus and pointed out that every nation that has moved

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Swept under the rug ...

a file photo shows the raging flames at the Magurchhara gas field (left) that engulfed miles of greenery (right) besides wreaking havoc on rail tracks and tea estates in the vicinity lashed by non-cooperation of the government, the parliamentary probe committee has decided to drop the case on Magurchhara blow-out.



Experts fear a dry spring from mid-Feb

SHEHAB AHMED

As the last of three mild cold waves this winter is now on the wane, weather experts fear a dry spring from mid-February.

Against an almost rainless winter, apprehension is rising about a dry spring and summer ahead during the critical phase of Irri-Boro season with some 37 lakh hectares under cultivation.

There was less than average rainfall in November last with December and January passing almost dry. According to data available from the Meteorological Department, rainfall in the country in October was 13 per cent more than the average. But in November, it was 59 per cent less than the average and December virtually passed without rain.

Only Rajshahi Division had some rainfall in December but rest of the country went bone dry.

January is also going dry, barring drizzles in Comilla and tarces elsewhere in the country.

Weather experts said it happened because three depressions/cyclones veered off the country towards India. Only one of the depressions generated rainfall in the middle of November.

"We can give a correct picture when we meet next week to assess the situation against the backdrop of the weather in January to prepare the long-range monthly forecast", an expert from the Water Development Board said.

Meteorological Department officials however dispelled fears of an abnormal weather pattern, saying it is too early to forecast a drought.

INSIDE TODAY

ARTICLE 14

Davos - a Bridge between Haves and Have-nots
Harun ur Rashid

BUSINESS 13&14

Quake knocks industrial wind out of prosperous Gujarat

US finance circles look for big Fed rate cut

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 30		5.43 pm
Jan 31	6-41 am	

Prayer Timings

January 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-30	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Maghrib	4-01.5	4-30
Maghrib	5-40	5-45
Esha	7-15	7-45

Gunrunning is their business

Rohingya settlers' syndicate in Ctg also smuggles in drugs, gold

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

Most of the 50,000 exiled Rohingyas, now settled in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong in the country's south-east, are engaged in smuggling of arms, drugs and gold, according to sources in police department and other law enforcement agencies.

Bulk of the illegal trade is carried out through Bangladesh-Myanmar border points in Teknaf, the sources said. Also, a so-called syndicate controls trafficking of arms, drugs, gold and other contraband items at the outer anchorage of the Chittagong port in connivance with foreign cargo vessels, they added.

The syndicate, formed by a Rohingya and a kingpin of a crime ring in the southern part of the port city, uses multiple channels for arms trafficking. Cache of arms and ammunitions is shipped in from the United Arab Emirates and other Middle Eastern countries and Libya. It also gets supply from the Karen rebels in Thailand and separatist militants in Malaysia. Besides, Chinese weapons come in through Myanmar, sources revealed.

The Rohingya leader reportedly owns palatial houses in the posh residential area of Kulshi in Chittagong and at DOHS in Dhaka.

Arrest of the chief of army staff of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) and one of his aides from a Chandgaon house in Chittagong has also raised concern among police and other intelligence agencies that the separatists may have been operating from secret bases in the country's south-eastern region.

In the early hours of January 22, a team of Cox's Bazar police, led by ASP of Ukhaia circle N Palit, made the arrests during a special drive. Police have also begun a hunt for other Rohingya militant leaders, who had been supposedly operating from the Chandgaon base for several years.

During the raid, police recovered foreign currencies and important documents. There were also a few pictures, including one of Salim Ullah, ARNO chief of military staff, with Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi.

ARNO is an alliance of extremist fundamentalist groups of Myanmar, including of Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), fighting for the independence of Arakan from Myanmar.

The recent raid followed an operation launched on August 29 last year by a joint team of police, BDR and magistrate to trace a separatist hideout atop the 700-foot Jumusia hill of Inani at Ukhaia.

In that operation two Rohingya militants, including the camp commander Abu Yasir, were arrested along with uniforms and some important documents while others managed to escape.

Following the special police drive, other separatist leaders have gone into hiding, police sources said. The two Chandgaon houses that the police raided on January 22, suspecting these to have been used as ARNO headquarters for several years, have been sealed off.

Police now suspect the Rohingya settlers regularly supply arms and ammunition to the separatists, who have been struggling for a separate state

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Joint inspection team to visit Naf area on Thursday

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A joint team of high officials from Bangladesh and Myanmar goes on a site inspection Thursday (February 1) to assess on-ground situation in the border area along the river Naf where tension prevails since January 8 when border forces of the two countries exchanged fire over construction of an embankment.

Following intense diplomatic negotiations, Dhaka and Yangon yesterday agreed on the site inspection and determine the type of structures constructed on the bank of the Naf.

Janibul Huq, joint secretary (political) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, leads a 15-member Bangladesh delegation, which includes high officials of the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Bomb attack on CPB rally a political mischief

PM tells senior police officers

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina feared machinations by the opposition to create disturbance before the general election and asked the police yesterday to thwart "politically motivated terrorism" to secure democracy and peace.

"Bomb attack on the CPB rally was a politically motivated mischief. Having failed in politics, they would try to stage such incidents of terrorism, killing, planned robbery to create unrest under a plan. Stand alert against any artificially created situation," she said.

Addressing senior police officers at her office on the Police Week the prime minister also asked them to redeem their sullied image, gain confidence of the people and work as their friends.

"People are with us, they want peace, not chaos and terrorism," she

told the police top brass. Although contentment has returned to public mind, the situation could have improved further if there had been any cooperation from the opposition, she added.

Citing some recent incidents in Dhaka and Chittagong, she said the opposition would launch evil propaganda to vitiate the atmosphere and satisfy their political design.

"We have restored democracy and voting rights through a costly struggle. Now what we want is that the democratic process continues, which is essential for economic progress. Be careful about any mischief," Hasina advised the police officials.

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim, Home Secretary M M Reza and Inspector General of Police

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Teenagers in phensidyl blues

Two lakh boys and girls in city in grip of the toxic syrup

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM

More than two lakh teenaged boys and girls including school students in the city are addicted to contraband phensidyl syrup, sources in the Department of Narcotics

Control (DNC) said.

These addicts buy it from different black markets in the absence of effective steps by the DNC and law enforcing agencies to check this.

A section of DNC officials back the illegal drug traders for money, it

is alleged.

The Detective Branch of Police seized 53, 896 bottles of phensidyl from different parts of the city last year, official records said. "This showed only the tip of an iceberg," an official noted.

A huge quantity of phensidyl is smuggled from a neighbouring country. Most of it comes into the country through the western border and it is also smuggled through Comilla border and brought to the city by train.

In several places, police and railway police are paid to allow smuggling of phensidyl into the country. There are different spots in the city where it is stored and sold to customers.

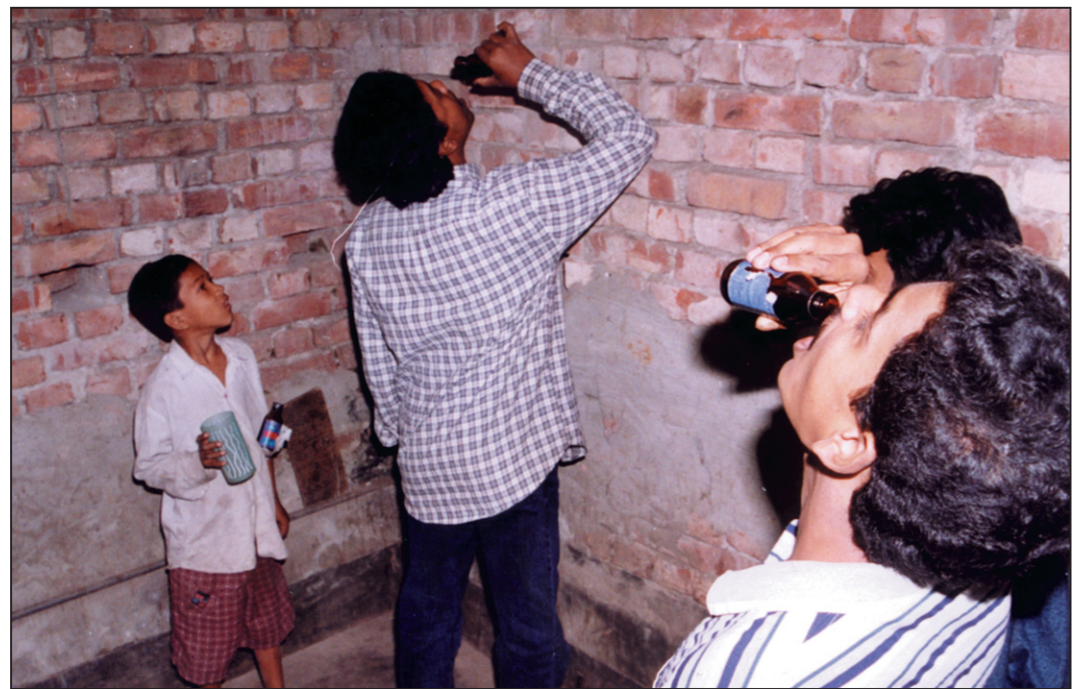
The officer-in-charge of a police station in the city told this correspondent, "Many guardians come to us and say that their children who are addicts should be arrested. Their number is quite high."

The number addicts is rising in the capital because the drug is available here and that many police personnel were injured during anti-drug raids in different areas, he said seeking anonymity.

When contacted, the Director General of DNC said, "We have to ensure that the drug is not smuggled into the country through the border area. At the same time, steps are needed to reduce the number of addicts through counselling and motivation"

Besides, the people in general and the young generation in particular should be made aware of the bad effects of this drug and the loss to national economy due to smuggling of it, he said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Awestruck...

a small boy looks on as three teenagers gulp phensidyl, a banned cough syrup widely used as intoxicant.



The dog story

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

When it comes to killing stray dogs, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) could probably claim to be the number one in the world.

DCC's Chief Health Officer Dr Mohammed Ashraf Uddin said they kill around 17,000 street dogs a year in the city.

Because of this, city dwellers are 'more or less safe from rabies epidemic,' he added.

When told about this, some people expressed surprise over the DCC figure on killing of stray dogs. "Those are paper dogs, killed only in papers and not in reality," said a retired government official.

DCC has no estimate of street

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

BNP now to campaign against 'misdeeds' of AL govt

REZAUL KARIM

Doubtful of the efficacy of ousting the AL government at this point before the elections, BNP has decided instead to launch country-wide anti-government programmes aiming to "isolate" the Awami League from the people through highlighting its "failures and misdeeds".

Sources said that its partners of the four-party alliance share this view and a fresh campaign programme will be announced by the alliance in a joint public meeting at Rangpur on February 4.

The alliance as part of its current anti-AL campaign, will hold a joint meeting at Bandarban today.

A top BNP leader yesterday told The Daily Star that the party will, both separately and jointly with

alliance partners, hold public rallies, mass processions and other programmes across the country to mobilise people's opinion in its favour and against the AL.

He said the BNP has decided to highlight government's failures and misdeeds of AL leaders, MPs and activists during the last four and a half years.

The leader observed that the government is already isolated from the people because of its anti-people activities, killing, repression, forcible occupation of public and

private properties, etc. "We will also highlight the criminal activities of the sons and relatives of government ministers, MPs and leaders and the brutal incidents that took place at Feni, Laxmipur, Narayanganj and Barisal in the last four and a half years," he said.

Besides, necessary preparations have also been made to publish posters, leaflets and booklets to be distributed widely at the grassroots level to create awareness among the people about Awami misrule.

Apart from that, the opposition will also call hartals and impose blockades in the coming months.

Another leader said the BNP would continue its anti-AL campaign till the last day of the next election, hoping to get any political mileage it could possibly get over its arch-rival.

He said popularity of the AL will definitely decline with every passing day and it would be better for BNP if the ruling party completes its full term and then resign. "We will get some more time to lengthen and diversify our anti-AL campaign if the government resigns at the end of its tenure."

A Standing Committee member of BNP said the AL is currently trying to create instability and lawlessness

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8