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Distribution, billing operation of Titas Gas to be privatised

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to initiate privatisation of the distribution and billing operations of the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the officials concerned to undertake a study of "the possibilities of deriving further economic and financial benefit" from Titas which is a subsidiary of Petrobangla, the state corporation on oil and gas.

The prime minister's directive came during a presentation on the country's mineral resources by Petrobangla officials.

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf

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Remittance NCBs asked to investigate irregularities, corruption

UNB, Dhaka

Chief executives of Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) have been asked to investigate irregularities and corruption in disbursement of foreign remittance to the beneficiaries.

Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan at a meeting at Finance Ministry yesterday asked the managing directors of NCBs to submit a report on irregularity and corruption within seven days.

In default, he threatened that the ministry officials would investigate into the irregularities indulged by some corrupt bankers, meeting sources said.

The meeting also advised Agrani Bank to open remittance house in Singapore and Janata Bank in Middle East to mobilise remittances from the non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs).

The meeting was told that the banks in some cases were not adhering to the directives of Bangladesh Bank to reach foreign remittance to the beneficiaries within three days.

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One page supplement on 'the Convocation of North South University'

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Nov 11		5-14 pm
Nov 12	6-12 am	

Prayer Timings

Nov 11		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-00	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Northern Alliance poised to attack Kabul

Laden threatens to use nukes against US



Osama bin Laden

AFP, Islamabad

Osama bin Laden says he has nuclear and chemical weapons and is willing to use them against the United States if attacked, according to an interview published here yesterday.

In his first interview since the September 11 terrorist assault on the United States, bin Laden also justified the suicide bombings and said all Americans were legitimate targets for supporting their government's actions.

"A great war of Islamic history is being fought in Afghanistan," bin Laden told Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir in the interview, published in the English-language newspaper Dawn and the Urdu-language daily Ahsan.

"I wish to declare that if America used chemical or nuclear weapons against us then we may resort with

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REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan's opposition Northern Alliance was advancing yesterday toward the Uzbek border in the north after seizing the strategic city of Mazar-i-Sharif and a province to the south.

A spokesman for former communist General Abdul Rashid Dostum said more territory was set to fall to opposition forces, following their first major victory since the US-led military campaign began 35 days ago.

In Islamabad, Dostum's spokesman told Reuters in an interview that Northern Alliance forces are advancing toward the Uzbek border and hope to open the frontier later in the day.

"Now it is more important after the capture of Mazar-i-Sharif city to move toward the border, to open the border," spokesman Sibghatullah Zakisaid.

"Our forces are close to the border and we hope that today we will open the border, we would capture the border," he added.

Opening a land link with US ally Uzbekistan would allow military and humanitarian supplies to flow across the border to anti-Taliban forces and the local population.

The Northern Alliance said yesterday it was considering attacking the capital Kabul despite a warning by US Secretary of State Colin Powell not to take the city.

"The liberation of Kabul from the Taliban would have great political and military significance," Abdullah Abdullah, foreign minister in the Afghan government-in-exile, told a press conference in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

However an attack was being considered, he said. "Our next steps have to be properly weighed up," he said.

Opposition commanders said they now had their eyes focused on the strategic town of Pul-i-Khumri that commands the main road south to Kabul, and the nearby northern province of Kunduz, whose fall would open the way to Tajikistan where stockpiles of Russian weapons are waiting for a means to be shipped to the Alliance.

Taliban Defense Minister Obaidullah Akhund told Reuters the militia had lost Mazar-i-Sharif.

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PHOTO: AFP

Northern Alliance soldiers shelling Taliban positions on the frontline near Dasht-i-Qalah yesterday. Afghan opposition forces after capturing the strategic town of Mazar-e-Sharif are now preparing to advance towards Kabul.

Gas sector: Presentation to PM lacks vital information

SHARIER KHAN

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain yesterday made a presentation to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on the country's gas sector which, competent sources said, lacked vital information.

However, the presentation did not have any information about the country's gas demand projection for 20 years, the current gas reserve depletion scenario and the historical gas demand growth scenario.

A team led by the Energy State Minister went to the Prime Minister's Office Saturday noon. The group appraised the Prime Minister of field-wise current gas production and demand, Petrobangla's organogram, a gas reserve and resource chart that was originally given by US oil company Unocal in its recent pipeline gas export proposal and other information relating to the sector.

"But the report lacks the main information and forecast on the

sector's growth. It also lacked any brief from the Sixth Five Year Gas Sector Development Plan," said a highly placed government source.

"The presentation was partial and it cannot help the decision-makers to take a decision on the sector."

Petrobangla officials worked extra hours Friday to provide presentation slides to Energy Secretary Akmal Hossain on the gas sector. However, finally the team did not take the slides relating to 20-year gas consumption projection, gas reserve depletion scenario and historical demand growth scenario.

"The presentation did not have anything on the pipeline gas export proposal of Unocal," another

government source said. "The Petrobangla Committee on Unocal's proposal has not yet started working as a team."

The State Minister for Energy had told the press earlier that a decision on gas export issue would be taken very soon.

Meanwhile, the United States is putting immense pressure on Bangladesh for gas export to India, tagging the issue with duty free and quota free access of garments to US market. Unocal has been lobbying with the government policy makers regarding gas export since it discovered gas in Bibiyana in 1998.

Regarding the pipeline export proposal, the source noted, "There is no policy guideline in this regard.

Besides, we cannot just agree to Unocal claims that pipeline export would be most profitable for us because we don't have our own study for regional gas utilisation and marketing. It might be possible that power export to India, instead of gas export, is much more profitable in the long run."

Another source said, "in its proposal, Unocal wants to build the pipeline in Bangladesh part and, interestingly, a consortium of Indian companies want to build the pipeline in India's part. Why? Unocal discussed export of our gas with Indian companies and it ignored our Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL)."

Dissecting Unocal's proposal further, he added, "The proposal did not show the Bibiyana gasfield development cost. Yet it showed an annual 30 million dollar cost for gas field development."

He continued, "It has also shown

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Two candidates for presidency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury of the ruling BNP and Barrister Rowshan Ali of Ershad-led Jatiya Party yesterday submitted nomination papers for the October 14 presidential election.

Enjoying the support of more than two-thirds of the total number of MPs, who are in the Treasury Bench, Badruddoza Chowdhury is poised to become the 13th president of the country. In parliamentary democracy, lawmakers elect the president.

Voting will take place in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Two nomination papers were submitted for Badruddoza, one of the founders of BNP. The first one was submitted by a three-member BNP delegation comprising PM's Political Secretary Haris Choudhury, RA Ghani and Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui and the second one by BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Chief Whip of the Treasury Bench Khandakar Delwar Hossain.

Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed received the nomination papers.

Earlier on the day, a meeting of the BNP standing committee with party chief and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair unanimously nominated Badruddoza for contesting the presidential polls. He was also present at the meeting.

Senior BNP leader Khandakar Mahbubuddin Ahmed proposed Badruddoza's candidature and Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed seconded it in his first nomination paper.

Mannan Bhuiyan proposed while Khandakar Delwar seconded his candidature in the second nomination paper.

Barrister Rowshan's candidature was proposed by Mujibur Rahman and seconded by Hafizuddin Ahmed, both JP lawmakers, according to an

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New office timing Low turnout of visitors at Sectt on first day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first day of new office timing at Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday was marked by a low turnout of visitors.

Most of the Cabinet Ministers and high officials were present at their offices. But some state ministers and deputy ministers were not seen at their offices. Sources said they had gone to their constituencies as per earlier programmes.

The cabinet at a meeting on November 5 re-fixed the official working days and timing which took effect from yesterday. Under the new schedule, Friday is the only weekly holiday with working hours from 9am to 4pm from Saturday through to Wednesday and half day office (9am to 2pm) on Thursday.

Most officials and employees at the Secretariat were found in a holiday mood. Many were seen sleeping at their desks.

There was a mixed reaction over the new office timing. Some said the previous schedule was better while others said they saw no radical change after the new timing.

Harrowing tales of depravity

Fear and insecurity still haunt them

STAR ROVING TEAM

From Bhola to Pirojpur, from Laxmipur to Jessore to Bagerhat, wherever The Daily Star roving teams went to investigate repression on the Hindus, the findings were strikingly and, frighteningly, similar.

All the Hindus had to say was how they had been subjected to looting, harassment, assault and, in some cases, rape.

It was quite clear that the attackers were after the valuables and lands of the Hindus. And, in the process, the Hindu women were an easy prey.

What struck the Daily Star teams most was the sheer inaction of the government to stop the atrocities and bring the criminals to book. The authorities almost

closed their eyes to the mayhem.

Till date, the Hindus are living in great fear and insecurity. They had to endure all these tortures silently, for they did not feel it was safe to report to the police or the administration about the incidents due to intimidation by the attackers. And, the government and the local

teams. Such events were mostly concentrated in rural areas, especially in the remote areas far from immediate administrative jurisdiction.

The Hindu businessmen had to pay handsome amount of tolls to buy security of their establishments. Even that was no guarantee

locked up the houses from outside and looted them one by one for two hours.

Naba Kumar Das, one of the victims of the village, narrated his story.

"I was sleeping on the veranda of my hut while my wife and three children slept inside the tiny hut on October 20. At around midnight, I woke up to the whispers of many voices. From the shadows came a group of about five unknown persons armed with machetes. The masked men identified themselves as policemen. They shoved me inside the hut and latched the room from outside. Then they went to other houses and did the same."

"About 15 to 20 minutes later, the

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Bangladesh opener Javed Omar playing a square cut during his innings of 35 against Zimbabwe at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A feeble fightback

AL-AMIN

A late flurry of wickets spoiled what could have been an encouraging day for Bangladesh on the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The home side looked like putting up a spirited fightback after Zimbabwe took a massive first innings lead of 324 runs when opener Javed Omar and one-down Habibul Bashar produced exactly 100 runs for the second wicket.

But the game's fortunes changed within the space 20 deliveries.

Both the firmly set batsmen threw their wickets when situation demanded a simple common sense from them to see out the day.

Javed, on 35, played an ambitious lofted drive off Marillier only to be comfortably caught at mid-off by Henry Olonga.

Bashar, who scored a fluent 65, his fifth Test half-century, was deceived by an innocuous looking slower delivery from Travis Friend and was caught by captain Brian Murphy.

Bangladesh finished the day on 125 for three with Aminul Islam batting on 6 and Mohammed Ashraf on nought.

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