

Barapukuria Coal Mine Project

# Implementation cost goes up by around \$ 500m

RAZIUR RAHMAN, back From Barapukuria

The implementation cost of Barapukuria Coal Mine Project has increased by around Tk 500 crore due to frequent devaluation of local currency against US dollar, changes in the taxation policy as well as an increase in debt service liability (DSL).

According to officials of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd., a subsidiary of Petrobangla, the initial project cost stood at Tk 887 crore. However, despite the project cost remains the same in terms of US dollar, frequent devaluation of local currency against US dollar has so far increased the implementation cost by Tk 298 crore. During the signing of the agreement, one US dollar was equivalent to Tk 39 while it is now equivalent to Tk 58.

Changes in taxation policy by the government has so far increased the implementation cost by Tk 112 crore while the amount of DSL has risen to Tk 98 crore, sources said.

The agreement of the US\$ 227 million coalmine project was signed in February 1994 and it came into effect in June 1994. Of the total project cost, \$109.25 million has been arranged under supplier's credit at a five per cent interest rate.

Meanwhile, CMC M&P Engineering Company, the Chinese firm constructing the mine, at a press briefing at the coal mine site at Barapukuria in Dinajpur on Thursday said the coal mine will be able to produce one lakh ton coal per year from October 2004. It added the life of the coal mine is 64 years.

The company said that the flooding inside the mine on April 5, 1998 was an accident and that they had taken all necessary preparations to deal with any sort of flooding in future.

The construction of the mine began in June 1996, and the project was initially scheduled to complete in June 2001. But following the flood inside the mine on April 5, 1998, the Chinese company redesigned its layout and completion date of the coal mine project has been rescheduled in October 2004.

When asked whether redesigning the layout will reduce the amount of coal production, John Warwick, the mining consultant of CMC, said at the press briefing, "The layout has been redesigned to produce one lakh tons of coal per year when the project is complete."

According to the CMC officials, 60 per cent work of the project has been completed. Blaming the flooding inside the mine in 1998 on a 'fault' in the coalfield, they

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

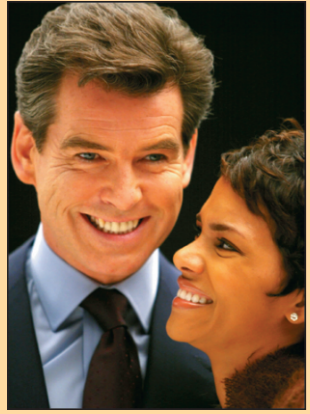


PHOTO: AFP

## Brosnan's 20th James Bond movie

Pierce Brosnan (L) and Halle Berry (R) smile during a photocall at Pinewood Studios yesterday. Brosnan and Berry will star in the 20th James Bond movie shooting of which starts January 14.

## 35 injured as rival groups clash in N'ganj

UNB, N'ganj

At least 35 people were injured in a fierce clash between two rival groups at Protapnagar in Fatulla thana yesterday.

Four of the injured, identified as Shahid, Ali Ahmed, Mannaf and Kanai Matabanj were admitted to Narayanjan Sadar Hospital while others to local clinics.

Local people said the trouble began at about 11 am when the supporters of Motaleb and Mohiuddin confronted following an attack on the house of Mohiuddin, a witness in the sensational Khaili murder case.

On Wednesday night, Motaleb, one of the accused in the murder case, set fire to the house of Mohiuddin. Motaleb was released on bail earlier in the day.

"As police did not take necessary steps in this regard, a group of headmen of Madhyanager reached Protapnagar where they came under attack by the supporters of Motaleb," said a witness.

Hearing the news, over a hundred people from Madhyanager rushed to the scene and clashed with the followers of Motaleb.

Both sides used lethal weapons during the clash that continued for two hours.

Later police brought the situation under control by clubbing the feuding people. They also recovered 108 spears from the scene and arrested two people -- Monir Hossain and Masud -- in connection with the clash.

Motaleb and his men are accused of killing trader Khaili on March 15 last year over lifting sand from river Buriganga.

## BNP activist slaughtered in Pabna

UNB, Pabna

A BNP activist was slaughtered by unidentified miscreants at Chakbaisha village in Ataikula thana on Wednesday night.

Police said a gang of miscreant picked up BNP activist Abul Hossain, 48, from his house at night and killed him at a place nearby.

A case was filed with Ataikula police.

Local BNP leaders condemned the killing.

## Transport strike in 16 northern dists from Jan 27

UNB, Pabna

North Bengal Transport Owners' Association has decided to go for an indefinite transport strike in 16 northern districts from January 27 to realise its 7-point demand.

The demands are: reduction of fuel price, allow operation of 20-year old vehicles having fitness certificate, confiscation of shallow engine vehicles, reduction of toll of Bangabandhu Bridge, withdrawal of toll of Singra-Teesta Bridge, stoppage of collection of illegal tolls by traffic sergeants and other members of law enforcing agencies and cancellation of registration of Shibganj Truck Samity and Bhangura-Chatmonhor-Faridpur Motor Mail Samity.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the samity Thursday chaired by Baby Islam.



Hosts run over... Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria makes a successful appeal against Bangladesh's Sanwar Hossain. Kaneria captured 7 wickets in the second innings against the hosts yesterday.

# Raozan, Fatikchhari: Hardly a day goes without violence

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

A volatile situation prevails in Raozan and Fatikchhari, known as the most vulnerable upazilas in the northern part of Chittagong, with no signs of an end to incidents of firing and other forms of violence, sources in the areas said.

Hardly a day passes here without such incidents. Illegal arms have flooded the two upazilas where several dozens of armed terrorists are operating, unleashing a spate of violence since the October 1 parliamentary polls. Consequently, many people had to take shelter in the port city or elsewhere.

A massive crackdown on the armed elements was supposed to be launched after the Eid last month

but it is yet to take place, local people said.

Asked about this, the DIG of police, Chittagong range, said, "We don't like to disclose in advance anything about our raids. But on receipt of secret information, our men are continuing operations there."

He however said, "We have a shortage of force, so it is difficult to go for massive crackdown."

The SP of Chittagong said steps were taken to deploy plain clothes policemen to nab the terrorists and recover illegal arms.

"But we are facing a problem as regards engaging sources or informers who can help us by giving information about the movement of terrorists with illegal arms," SP

Shahidul Huq said. "Actually, the situation in Raozan and Fatikchhari is such that sources or informers are afraid of cooperating with police."

Some people mentioned that even the Awami League MP from Raozan could not yet go to his village home at Gohira in Raozan, fearing attacks by supporters of his rivals. He is now staying in the city.

Activists supporting the law-maker and many others who fled their houses in Raozan also did not dare to return as yet.

In Fatikchhari, the Awami League MP sometimes go to his village home, escorted by party activists and under police protection. But he cannot move freely in the villages under the upazila.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8



The Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre built with Chinese financial assistance will be officially handed over to Bangladesh when visiting Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji inaugurates it today.

ASM NURUNNABI

The proliferation of shops in the Dhaka City is such a staggering phenomenon that the entire city is virtually choked with them. Side by side with this picture, we have lately been witnessing a steady growth of large shopping complexes called malls. This is a new phase of our urban development. The extravagant multi-storied shopping complexes can be found in all important areas of the city, such as Hatirpool, Elephant Road, Kakrail, Maghbazzar as well as in posh areas like Gulshan, Banani, Uttara and Dhanmondi.

These new developments are said to be the products of emerging new concepts from open market economic policies and wider horizon in commercial fields made possible in the present satellite age. As a result, by and large, the consumer psychology has been undergoing significant changes. Of course, this change has been brought about by large-scale, improvement in quality and wide-ranging varieties of products, both imported and indigenous.

Now, the intriguing question is how the present trend of fast growing sophisticated shopping malls gets its impetus. The big investments that are made in building up these facilities may have come from

## DOWN TO EARTH

# Boom in shopping malls in the city

various sources, such as bank loans, advances made by parties interested in getting allotment of commercial space in prime locations, remittances from abroad from people interested in lucrative investments either as owners or partners. Another big question is to what extent the various businesses set up in such high-profile establishments are economically viable. The present picture in this behalf does not seem to be very clear.

Our per capita income is said to be US\$200 per year and 80 per cent of our population is said to live below the poverty line. In spite of this poor economic situation of our country, it seems to be a mystery how such lavish establishments are feasible in economic terms to cater to the needs of the general consumers

who do not enjoy the benefit of high income.

Different trends are observed in matters relating to prices of different commodities. For example, various consumer items such as apparels, beauty products imitation jewellery, home decoration items, food and beverage, though imported from the same countries of origin, carry different price tags at different establishments. It is obvious that customers at shops in posh areas belong mostly to a stratum of society with considerable financial strength. To them such differences in prices may not matter much.

But it is a reality that there are many other customers, not accustomed to free-style spending, yet eager to get the right quality products at the right price, might feel

choosy about their selection in the face of such price differences. The prevailing situation of high price levels in selected shopping areas of the city is much like parallels to be found in the Ginza area of Tokyo, Oxford Circus area of London or Fifth Avenue area of New York.

It is however, undeniable that there are many causative factors for charging higher prices at shops housed in shopping malls. They include high investment outlay, bank interest, salaries of employees, high maintenance cost, custom duties on imported goods, illegal tolls exacted by mastan groups in a locality. Such overhead expenditures need to be included in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Silk Air allowed Ctg-Singapore direct flights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has approved the proposal of a foreign airliner to operate three flights per week from the port city of Chittagong to Singapore.

As per an agreement between the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, and Silk Air of Singapore, the airliner would start its direct flight operation from Chittagong to Singapore on March 3 this year.

Silk Air, a sister concern of Singapore Airlines, was given the permission to operate direct flights from Chittagong to Singapore at a meeting between the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, and Silk Air on Thursday.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin chaired the meeting.

The meeting viewed that the government has permitted the route to increase air traffic for better utilisation of the Chittagong International Airport, the country's second international airport.

The meeting was attended among others by secretary of the ministry M Safayat Ali, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority Bangladesh (CAAB) Lutfur Rahman, Managing Director of Bangladesh Biman M Khasrul Alam and General Manager of Singapore Airlines (Bangladesh) Joseph Chia.

## British minister arrives Jan 14

BSS, Dhaka

British Minister of State in the Department for International Development, Hilary Benn MP, will visit Bangladesh from January 14-17, a British High Commission press release.

He is expected to meet the prime minister, finance and planning minister, commerce minister and home minister. Benn will also visit development projects at Mirpur, Pabna and Tangail.

During the visit, he will review the British development assistance programme to Bangladesh and conduct discussions with the government of Bangladesh.

## 4 muggers held with arms in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mobile team of Khulshi thana police arrested four muggers with arms from the city's Golpaha area under Panchlaish thana yesterday.

Police said, the four muggers waylaid a rickshaw in front of Coffee Inn, a Chinese restaurant, at around 1.30 pm and snatched a gold chain from its female passenger.

As she cried for help, pedestrians and a patrol police team chased the autorickshaw carrying the muggers and caught them from OR Nizam road.

Police also recovered a pistol and two knives from their possession.

The muggers were identified as Md. Mostafa, 23, Alauddin, 19, Nurul Alam, 28, and Md. Idris, 25.

# Mongla Port & Passur river 57 pirate raids on foreign ships in last 2 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The country's second-largest seaport Mongla and the Passur River are in the grip of pirates.

Captains, crew and other employees aboard the foreign ships feel insecure due to frequent attacks by armed robbers.

Sources said at least 57 incidents of piracy occurred in the foreign ships in the last two months.

The pirates robbed crew and captains of their valuables, including money. Also injured were some of them in the armed attacks when they resisted the pirates.

The incidents of piracy have increased at so alarming a rate at the Mongla port and on the Passur River that the crew and captains of the foreign ships do not want to stay there.

On the night of January 1, armed robbers launched an attack on a foreign ship, MV Skyline, and looted all valuables of the crew and ropes worth several lakh taka. Four persons were severely beaten by the robbers.

On the night of December 31 last year, armed pirates looted at gunpoint ropes, wires and all personal belongings of the crew of MV Atlantic Sprint.

On December 27, an armed gang plundered the valuables of the crew of MV D.S. Artica, another foreign ship.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



## Barrister AR Yusuf dead

UNB, Dhaka

Eminent lawyer and former Minister Barrister AR Yusuf died of cancer at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) here yesterday evening. He was 70.

He left behind his wife, one son, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers.

Family sources said AR Yusuf was suffering from brain tumour and operated upon at a Singapore Hospital two years ago. He was

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3