

Canadian oil co's 'uneven' proposal revived

SHARIER KHAN

Under pressure from the state minister for energy, Energy Ministry and Petrobangla yesterday revived a suspended unsolicited process to award an unexplored oil and gas field to Canadian company Niko Resources in the name of 'marginal gas field development', according to well placed official sources.

Officials had suspended the process during the tenure of the last caretaker government, considering that it was 'violating' several rules and would set a 'bad precedence'.

Although the problems were raised on several occasions in the past, the state minister asked officials of the ministry and the Petrobangla to revive Niko's proposal 'urgently'.

A meeting headed by the Energy Secretary on Wednesday reviewed the proposal that seeks to explore and develop three 'marginal gas fields' through a joint venture with BAPEX.

The three marginal gas fields—Kamta, Feni and Chhatak—now belong to Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Ltd (BGFL) and Sylhet Gas Field Ltd (SGFL). As per Niko's proposal, Bapex's share in the project would come from its ownership in the three fields. In other words, the government will have to pay the BGFL and SGFL for these fields unnecessarily to transfer the ownership to BAPEX.

Moreover, Petrobangla had earlier raised objection to terming Chhatak

gas field as a 'marginal field'. It had said that the eastern part Chhatak field was an unexplored area and could not be termed 'marginal'.

A 'marginal gas field' means it has been explored and used or abandoned. During the fag end of Awami League rule, higher authorities were putting pressure on Bangladeshi exploration company BAPEX and its parent organisation Petrobangla to sign an agreement with Niko Resources to develop these gas fields. Petrobangla officials pinpointed several problems such as, under which policy Niko would work as a joint venture and the tax exemption facility sought by Niko. Several other problems were also raised.

As these required amendment to certain rules, Petrobangla was asked to draft a policy. As a policy requires cabinet approval which would delay the process further, high-ups in the then government then instructed Petrobangla to formulate a 'procedure', instead of a policy under which Niko would work.

The 'procedure' was sent to a high-powered committee comprising four secretaries to the then government. To make sure that a deal is signed with Niko anyhow, the committee added a footnote to the procedure.

The footnote said whatever discussions had taken place and drafts made till date regarding the Niko proposal would be deemed to have been done in compliance with the procedure. The procedure with the footnote, if implemented, would have forced Petrobangla to accept any proposal made by Niko, even if uneven, the sources said.

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UP chairman stabbed to death in B'baria

UNB, B'baria

A chairman of local Union Parishad was stabbed to death by unidentified assailants at Bhalakut village in Nasirnagar upazila here on Thursday night.

Police said a gang 20 terrorists stormed into the house of Dhanu Mia, 40, chairman of Bhalakut Union Parishad and stabbed him indiscriminately. Dhanu Mia died on the spot.

Reason behind the killing could not be known. Police arrested three people in connection with the killing.

Police Super Abdur Rahim and TNO of Nasirnagar Monir Hossain visited the spot.

'Police harassment' Exporters, importers on strike at Sonamasjid land port

UNB, C'nawabganj

Exporters-importers and clearing-forwarding agents began an indefinite strike at Sonamasjid land port yesterday, suspending country's external trade through the north-western border.

Exporters-importers group and C&F Agents Association went on strike to protest "police harassment" during transportation of import-export commodities.

Customs sources said the government is being deprived of Tk 50 to Tk 60 lakh in revenue a day due to the strike at the land port.

The C&F Association alleged that police harassment in the name of checking smuggling during transportation of goods is increasing every day despite showing valid import-export documents.

"Despite showing necessary documents, detective police seized a truck carrying fruits, imported from India, at Kashiadanga square and lodged a smuggling case," said the association.

Three alleged robbers beaten to death in Fatikchhari

UNB, Ctg

Three alleged robbers were killed in mob beating at Datmara Bazar in Fatikchhari upazila yesterday.

Police said shopkeepers aided by locals caught three members of 'Yusuf Bahini' when they were preparing to commit robbery at the bazaar at about 2 pm.

All the three, identified as Idris Ali, 26, Abul Kalam, 32 and Badiul Alam, 28, died on the spot as the mob beat them over mercilessly. Four other members of the same gang managed to flee firing gunshots.

Police recovered the bodies in the evening.



PHOTO: STAR

Convener of Mahakal Union Awami League and ward commissioner of Abhoynagar Poursava Atiar Rahman was shot dead allegedly by BCP armed cadres with these guns (inset) in Jessore yesterday.

PBCP men kill AL leader in Jessore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Atiar Rahman, 48, convener of Mahakal Union Awami League and a ward commissioner of Abhoynagar Poursava, was gunned down allegedly by armed cadres of Purbo Banglar Communist Party at Chengutia Bazar in Abhoynagar upazila in Jessore yesterday morning.

His sons Bappi, 8, and Opi, 4, were also bullet injured although they were not targets of the alleged killers, police said.

According to eyewitnesses, the gunmen shot him in the chest from a close range with sawn-off guns when he reached Chengutia Bazar riding a motor cycle with two sons. He died on the spot and his sons were admitted to Jessore Sadar Hospital.

Atiar Rahman survived two more attempts on his life last year, made

allegedly by the same group of PBCP cadres. Security men assigned to protect him were withdrawn after the four-party alliance came to power.

Fearing another attempt on his life, he repeatedly sought security from Jessore police but failed to get it, members of his family said.

Police said that soon after the killing yesterday, one of the alleged PBCP cadres was caught and beaten by a mob. He was admitted to Jessore Hospital and was yet to regain consciousness.

Two sawn-off guns, a live cartridge and six used cartridges were recovered from the place of occurrence.

Police said Atiar Rahman was one of the eye-witnesses to the murder of Jubo Dal leader Ikram about two years back at the same place, Chengutia Bazar.

Since then, he received many threats on his life.

JCD activists damage filling station at Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Armed activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) yesterday damaged a filling station in Mirabazar area of Sylhet town, causing serious injury to an employee there.

Sushil Ahmed, the employee, was admitted into Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Sources said two young men on a motorbike came to gas up at the Biroi filling station at about 2:15pm. But when the attendant asked them to pay for the fuel, they became agitated and attacked him.

The two soon left the station but returned shortly afterwards along with a group of about ten armed men.

The gang swooped on the employees of the filling station and then went on the rampage, breaking all the glasses and other materials.

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Show of strength over mayoral candidature in Khulna

Ruling party rivals bring out big processions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Rivalry in ruling BNP over candidature for the post mayor of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) has turned into showdown on streets.

Following big show-of-strength processions, tension is mounting in the city amid muscle-flexing by supporters of KCC Mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman and City BNP Secretary Nazrul Islam Manju.

Manju's supporters brought out a big procession in the city on Thursday demanding his candidature. "None but Manju Bhai would be allowed to be a candidate" was one of many slogans during the 'show-down', described by observers as the biggest in the city in recent times.

After the rally, the party leaders, activists and supporters held a rally where they declared Manju as the "most eligible person" from the four-party alliance to contest for the mayoral post.

On the following day, a big procession was brought out in favour of Tayeb. Hundreds of activists from all wards of the city and unions of the district joined the procession.

They chanted slogans congratulating BNP chief Khaleida Zia for "asking Tayeb to start campaign for

the polls".

When asked later, Tayeb said, "I am yet to know officially, but I have been asked by the party high command to campaign".

But he did not make any comment on the emergence of another man from the same party to contest for the mayoral post.

One of his supporters said, "Tayeb Bhai does not want to belittle any one of the party. He will abide by the decision of party's high command".

Tayeb needs no showdown to impress the party high command, many of his supporters said expressing the hope that he would be a candidate for the mayoral post.

Party insiders expressed grave concern at the heightening intra-party rivalry over candidature for the post of KCC mayor. The two rival factions should be united before selecting he mayoral candidate, they said.

Party insiders said neither Tayeb nor Manju has got green signal to start campaign. But both have started mass contact.

The KCC election will be held on April 25. The election will not be held on party basis.

ASM NURUNNABI

An example of the city's growing slum-like entity is provided by the sprawling residential complex for government functionaries known as Azimpur Estate, the biggest of its kind in the city. Spread over an area of more than 50 acres of land, the estate, when it came into existence, was a novel experiment in community living. After the partition of British India, when the government of the then East Pakistan felt the urgent need for providing residential accommodation for its employees, it took up the project on a priority basis. Thus, Azimpur Estate has a long history. Begun in the early fifties of the last century, it has evolved through a number of phases.

Originally, the residential complex reportedly had about 50 residential units under a couple of categories and was meant for middle income people.

Later, the estate was expanded northwards. Overall, the total number of units covering the entire area where additional quarters were constructed stood at an estimated 126 under the main categories.

DOWN TO EARTH

Of the city's largest housing complex at Azimpur

When the quarters were first constructed, there was virtually no congestion within the complex. There was adequate open space between units and also a number of playgrounds for children.

The whole scenario, however, began to change after Liberation when the rapid growth in the number of government employees seeking accommodation necessitated the construction of additional units on the available lands within the estate.

With the need for additional housing growing at a steady pace over the years, the situation came to such a pass that the pieces of land between buildings began to disappear with construction of new

buildings on them. Even the few open spaces and the playgrounds were not spared. Now even parts of small tanks within the periphery of the estate compound have been filled up for construction of new buildings.

As a result of such mad rush for accommodation, the entire housing complex has now worn the look of a sort of urban slum. Moreover, there are an increasing number of shops of various kinds along the sidewalks within the complex and a growing Kutcha Bazaar within the periphery of the estate.

Other factors compounding the problem of overcrowding are a kindergarten and a girls' school that has been upgraded into a college

not too long ago.

The student population of the school and college has also increased manifold, with the result that at the beginning and end of classes, the adjoining areas witness a staggering increase in the number of pedestrians and vehicles, and the consequent traffic jam takes hours to clear up. This has been a daily routine affecting the environment of the whole locality.

To make matters worse, some anti-social elements reportedly gain easy access into the estate compound and some spend their nights under staircases carrying out dubious activities affecting the environment of the estate.

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Businessman's eyes gouged out in N'ganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hoodlums Thursday night gouged out the eyes of a businessman at Jhalokuti, Siddhirganj in Narayanganj, apparently in revenge for naming them as suspects in a theft.

The victim Hafizur Rahman, 28, a dealer in iron grill, was first admitted to Narayanganj General Hospital and later shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Sources said a gang of hoodlums abducted Rahman from his Jhalokuti residence Thursday night and took him to Siddhirganj ferry terminal. The gang then gouged his eyes out with a sharp weapon.

Local people rescued the hapless victim and rushed him to the Narayanganj General Hospital.

Sources alleged that the same gang had stolen the businessman's motorbike that created a sensation in the area. Later, Rahman named them to the police as suspected thieves of his motorbike. Angered by the matter, the hoodlums took revenge by gouging out the eyes of the businessman.

The sources further alleged that the police, instead of protecting Rahman, leaked out his identity to the gang of hoodlums, which resulted into the ghastly incident.

City corpn polls BNP men asked to refrain from campaigning till Mar 20

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdull Mannan Bhuiyan has asked party leaders and workers to refrain from campaigning for the coming city corporation elections till March 20.

The instruction was given at a joint meeting of BNP, its city unit and different front organisations at the party central office yesterday.

"We have more than one aspirant candidate for the post of mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) elections. We will finalise our candidate by March 20. So you all must refrain from campaigning till then," Bhuiyan said.

He also advised party leaders and workers to work for the person who would be nominated by the party as mayoral in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) polls.

Sources said the instruction was given in the wake of wall writings, processions and rallies in favour of aspirant mayoral candidates.

Owner of shrimp enclosure murdered in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Hafizur Rahman, 42, owner of a shrimp enclosure, was murdered in Phultala upazila Thursday night.

Police recovered the body from Dakatia Beel yesterday morning.

Police said the assailants strangled Hafiz while he was asleep at his shrimp enclosure.

The reason behind the murder could not be known till 8 pm yesterday.

The body sent to hospital morgue for autopsy.

Acase was filed with Phultala thana.

CPA to drop its lock-port cum free-port plan

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, From Chittagong

The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) has decided to drop the ambitious and multimillion dollars plan for establishment of a 'lock-port cum free-port' on the southern bank of the Karnaphuli River.

The decision came after M/S Mott MacDonald, the UK-based consultancy that carried out the feasibility study, discouraged implementation of the highly technical and costly plan.

Initially, the CPA hoped the plan would have far-reaching benefits for entrepreneurs from both home and abroad, though.

The port authority agreed to implement the project after a series of discussions in 2000 with top officials of the ministry con-

cerned.

According to the proposed plan, a lock-port (artificial harbour having a basin or river management mechanism) and a duty-free industrial zone to be named as 'free-port' were planned to be established.

Sources said Belgium, the Netherlands, and UAE (Jabel Ali Port in Dubai) have parts of the kind.

The idea of establishing a lock-port cum free-port is new for the developing countries like Bangladesh, the primary plan said.

Referring to the example of Jabel Ali Port in Dubai, the plan suggested that a similar free-port could be established near KAFCO and CUFL on the southern bank of the Karnaphuli River.

Entrepreneurs and investors would be able to build their industrial units at the free port, a duty-free area, provided adequate allocation of lands, the plan said.

All vessels loaded with cargoes would have direct access to the proposed port and the investors could import and export their products without paying any tax and duty, the plan added.

But recently, the CPA had received negative responses from the consultancy, a senior official of the Chittagong Port told The Daily Star.

The consultancy recommended that the plan would neither be technically feasible nor economically viable for Bangladesh, as it would require about 500-million dollars, he said.

10pc regulatory duty on cotton yarn import likely

RAFIQ HASAN

A 10 per cent regulatory duty on import of cotton yarn is likely to be slapped soon to protect the local producers.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has already taken the decision and would issue a statutory regulatory order (SRO) soon, according to a finance ministry source.

A draft SRO has already been sent to the law ministry for vetting.

The local spinning mill owners have long been demanding ban on import of yarn because of 'uneven competition'.

Around US\$ 1 billion worth of yarn has been piled up at different

spinning mills due to low market prices, spinners claim.

President of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BKMEA) Manjurul Huq said the proposed regulatory duty would not affect apparel export as it would be applicable for the commercial importers only.

The garments exporters import yarn and fabrics without any duty under back-to-back letters of credit (LC), he said.

The regulatory duty on commercial import of yarn is necessary to check its smuggling, he observed.

The BKMEA president further said quality of local yarn is some-

times very poor and prices are around 35 per cent higher than those in the international market.

According to the NBR, around 10-12 million kg of cotton yarn are imported annually.

After imposing 10 per cent regulatory duty, the total import duty on cotton yarn would stand at around 39 per cent.

Currently there is a 28.75 per cent duty on import of cotton yarn. The duty includes five per cent custom duty, 15 per cent Value Added Tax (VAT), 2.5 per cent development surcharge, three per cent advance income tax (AIT) and 2.5 per cent licence fee.

Narasimha Rao acquitted in bribery case

AP, New Delhi

The Delhi High Court reversed the bribery and corruption conviction of former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on Friday, withdrawing a three-year prison sentence imposed after he was found guilty of buying lawmakers' votes to save his government in 1993.

Rao, 79 who held office from 1991-96, was convicted Sept. 29 of criminal conspiracy, bribery and corruption, becoming the first Indian prime minister to be found guilty in a criminal case. He became prime when his predecessor Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a Tamil rebel suicide bomber.

Rao had remained free pending the appeal.

He is credited with putting in place India's economic reforms that dismantled four decades of Soviet-style controls on industry.

However, Rao was also blamed for doing little to prevent the destruction of the 16th century Babri

mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya in 1992, which set off furious nationwide riots and remains the nation's most complex religious dispute.

His Congress party formally apologized later for its inaction in the Ayodhya crisis, which has simmered for 10 years.

In Ayodhya of Friday, the snow-balling crisis seemed defused after Hindu nationalists who threatened to defy the Supreme Court and armed police to hold a Hindu ceremony near the destroyed mosque changed their plan.

In the High Court on Friday, Judge RS Sodhi also acquitted Buta Singh, who served as Rao's home minister, and had received the same sentence, Press Trust of India reported.

The Supreme Court found that the chief witness against Rao and Sodhi, a lawmaker who said he was paid a bribe for his vote and testified for the prosecution, was an unreliable witness.

Hazari sued under Arms Act

BSS, Feni

Joyal Abedin Hazari, general secretary of the district Awami League, has been sued under Arms Act on Thursday.

Police and court sources said Hazari was charged for not depositing his licensed arms and bullets within the stipulated time set by the government.

The number of cases filed against Hazari, a fugitive former AL lawmaker, now stands at 18 with the filing of the latest case.

Housewife raped allegedly by cop in Satkhira

UNB, Satkhira

A housewife was raped allegedly by a policeman at Enayetpur village in Tala upazila on Wednesday night.

Local people said constable Shahiduzzaman of Kholiskhali outpost raped the woman, a mother of two children, when her husband was not at home.

Hearing screams of the victim, neighbours rushed to the spot, caught the rapist red-handed and handed him over to police.