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## Bid to make Unocal pay for Magurchhara mess

SHARIER KHAN

Nearly six years after the Magurchhara blow-out, Petrobangla is getting ready to officially claim around US\$ 600 million in compensation from US oil company Unocal for damaging the gas structure in the 1997 mess.

According to a well-placed source, the board of directors of Petrobangla will sit within a week or two to decide the exact nature of the compensation claim.

It is likely to ask Unocal to compensate for damaging 240 billion cubic feet (bcf) of gas of the Magurchhara gas structure, the source added.

The exact financial figure is yet to be worked out, but Petrobangla sources said it could be around \$2.6 for per unit (thousand cubic feet or tcf) of gas, the price at which Unocal sells gas to Petrobangla from the Jalalabad gas field.

Such calculation puts the total claim figure at \$600 million.

"However, there might be other ideas about compensation figure. That's why, the Petrobangla board would discuss it," said the source.

Earlier, the Ministry of Environment claimed Tk 612 crore in environmental damage from Unocal although it was never seriously pursued.

Nearly four months ago, Petrobangla sought the Ministry of Energy's approval for claiming Magurchhara gas damage compensation. The minis-

try gave its go-ahead few days ago, sources said.

The planned compensation claim is based on findings and assessments of a probe committee report prepared after the Magurchhara blowout.

"The whole process is going too slow," observed an official, "and it seems that we did not actually suffer any loss in the Magurchhara blow-out."

Though the incident took place back in June 14, 1997, Petrobangla could not demand the gas damage compensation as the past Awami League (AL) government shelved the official probe report on the Magurchhara blow-out and kept it as a 'classified' document.

Moreover, the AL government adopted a policy to let US oil company Occidental, found responsible for the blow out, operate in the country without being penalised.

The terminated production sharing contract (PSC) with the Occidental was extended in 1998, allowing it to work in Bangladesh and sell off its concerns in Bangladesh to Unocal before packing up in 1999.

In late 2000, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy raised the issue of the report of Magurchhara probe committee formed with energy ministry and Petrobangla officials. A tug of war followed between the then energy secretary Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and standing committee head

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: A K MOHSIN

The hillocks in the background are being dug and destroyed to make bricks at the brick kilns by the Hathazari Road adjacent to the Chittagong Cantonment at Bhatiyar.

## Padua hero retired

M ANWARUL HAQ

Major General ALM Fazlur Rahman, GOC 11 Division and Area Commander, Bogra, and former director general of the BDR, was given compulsory retirement yesterday, sources said.

Soon after the retirement order was sent, the Padua hero was asked to relinquish command.

Major General Fazlur Rahman shot to fame in April last year when BDR officers and troops under his

command reclaimed Padua in Sylhet and later repulsed intruding forces in Boraibari.

Another two-star general was sent into compulsory retirement, while three brigadier generals were made major generals in a major shake-up in the army yesterday, the sources said.

Brigadier General Moeen U Ahmed, psc, Abu Roshde Rokonuddawla, psc, and F M Ekramul Haq were promoted to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Five killed in grenade attack on Pak church

Wife, daughter of US diplomat among dead

AFP, Islamabad

Five people, including a US diplomat's wife and daughter, were killed and 46 others injured in a grenade attack yesterday during a prayer service at a Protestant church in the Pakistani capital.

"Among the dead are two US citizens. They are the wife and daughter of a US diplomat," a police intelligence officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A Pakistani woman, an Afghan man and an unidentified person were also killed, the head of the interior ministry's National Crisis Cell, Brigadier Javed Cheema, told AFP.

A US embassy spokesman said that two Americans had been killed but

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Rule of law in ruling whirlpool

Most BNP policymakers, bureaucrats dead against separation of the judiciary, other steps

ZAYADUL AHSAN

The BNP cannot implement its key election pledges to ensure absolute rule of law as most of the ruling party's policymakers and some bureaucrats are dead against such a move, sources said.

The differing policymakers believe the ruling party would find it difficult to run state affairs if it implements the election pledges.

As regards its commitment to separate the judiciary from the

executive wing, seen as a crucial move for establishment of rule of law, the government is dragging its foot.

The Supreme Court's final deadline to the government to separate the judiciary ended yesterday, the government has sought a six-month extension. The Supreme Court will decide on the appeal today.

In its election manifesto, the BNP had categorically pledged to ensure absolute rule of law and separation of the judiciary from the executive

wing of the government.

The party also committed to repeal Awami League government-enacted black laws, namely the Special Powers Act (SPA) 1974 and the Public Safety Act (PSA) 2000, which it said, violated the basic rights of the people stipulated by the constitution.

Its election manifesto also said the BNP would establish a human rights commission in Bangladesh. It added that it would set up a constitutional and an independent Anti-

corruption Commission by restructuring the Bureau of Anti-corruption.

The government so far took a decision to scrap the PSA at a cabinet meeting a couple of months ago. But this act is still in force and more often than used against political opponents.

It formed different committees to deal with these election pledges. However, as all these issues must go through a political decision-making process, it is not clear if they will be implemented.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## 22 including AL, BCL leaders nabbed for madrassah fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested 22 persons including an Awami League leader and three Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists for their suspected involvement in Saturday's fire at a women's madrassah which killed seven girls.

The political activists have been remanded for five days yesterday in a case filed with the Demra Police Station while the rest were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail.

They arrested are: Shani Datt, city unit joint secretary of AL; Moktar Hossain, an activist of BCL; Abu Bakar Siddique, Dhania unit of BCL general secretary; another BCL leader Monirul Alam, Mohammad Ashraf, Kajal Chandra Sarkar, Liton, Krishna, Uttam, Hamid, Arif, Shah Alam, Reaz, Jahirul, Abul Hossain, Anwar Hossain, Hanif, Amin, Moselm, Shah Alam, Abu Shahid and Manurul.

At least seven girl students were burnt to death and over 100 others injured in a fire that gutted the Jamia Islamia Ashraf-ul-Ulum Women's Madrassah and Orphanage on Saturday night.

Demra police said detectives launched a massive hunt at Shanir Akhra and its adjacent areas for several hours last night and arrested the persons for suspected arson.

Earlier, Fazlur Rahman, a member of the madrassah's advisory committee, filed a case with the Demra Police Station Saturday.

Rahman alleged that some unidentified persons set the women's madrassah on fire following enmity.

## 8 die as bus skids off Dhaka-Ctg highway

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Eight people, including a female joint district judge, were killed and over 25 others injured when a bus skidded off the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway into a ditch at Tribardi in Sonargaon upazila yesterday morning.

Sabrina Ahmed, 40, joint district judge of the Comilla Judge's Court, was the youngest daughter of late justice Hasibuddin Ahmed.

The fatal accident left Rehana Sultana, 30, killed on the spot and her husband Ataur Rahman, joint secretary of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, and their son Sabnan Fayaz critically injured.

Three of the dead are Bazlur Rahmn 38, son of Ali Akber of Baghmara in Comilla, Abul Hossain, 40, a jawan of Comilla Cantonment and son of Abdul Jabber, and Farhad Chowdhury, 50, an employee of ICDDR, B in Dhaka.

The identity of the rest -- a woman, aged about 35, and two men, aged between 35 and 45, could not be known till last night.

Critically injured, Ataur and his ten-year-old son Fayaz, Abdur Rab, Mohammad Mamun, Yasin and Faruk were rushed to a hospital in the capital. The rest of the injured were admitted to the Sonargaon Upazila Health Complex.

The 52-seater Comilla-bound bus (Tisha) from Dhaka plunged into the roadside ditch at Tribardi near Daudkandi bus stand, as one of its rear wheels deflated at about 10.00am.

Five passengers died on the

spot, while the rest were declared dead on arrival at the local hospitals.

Police quoted the witnesses as saying that the bus skidded off the road when it tried to yield to another bus coming from the opposite direction.

The police superintendent of Narayanganj district visited the spot cordoned off by police.

A case was filed with Sonargaon Police Station in this regard.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her deep shock at the loss of life in the accident.

## Muggers hack van driver to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers hacked to death a van driver and injured his helper at Gudaraghat at Mirpur Section-1 in the city yesterday morning.

Abdus Sobhan, 48, a van driver of Tabani Beverage and his helper Sattar were returning home after night duty. As they reached in front of the government shelter for vagabonds at about 6am, some muggers intercepted them and tried to snatch money and valuables.

As Sobhan scuffled with the mugger, the mugger hacked him indiscriminately, leaving him criti-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

## INSIDE TODAY

Article 4

The Saudi peace initiative for Middle East  
Column: Perspectives  
M Abdul Hafiz

Business 6-7

BTMA says spinning units meet knit industry requirement

US to demand tighter standards for use of aid

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 18		6-09 pm
Mar 19	6-04 am	

## Prayer Timings

Mar 18	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-15	6-20
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

## 2500 expelled on third day of SSC exams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 2500 SSC examinees were expelled from different centres across the country for cheating on the third day yesterday.

Also expelled were 11 teachers for their alleged connivance in cheating in the Bengali first paper examination.

A total of 1,206 examinees were expelled from different examination centres under Rajshahi Education Board. Of them, 38 were expelled in Rajshahi, 25 in Pabna, 66 in Naogaon, 130 in Sirajganj, 80 in Bogra, 158 in Rangpur, 64 in Kurigram, 174 in Gaibandha, 51 in Nilphamari, 21 in Lalmonirhat and 29 in Panchaghar.

The number of expelled examinees under Dhaka Education Board is 345.

One examinee was expelled from

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3