

Shell, Petrobangla

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tant John Burns earlier this year as a third party mediator since they could not agree over each other's point of views.

According to a Shell high official, since Shell-Cairn began supplying Sangu gas in mid-1998, Petrobangla began deducting eight per cent of the oil companies' monthly bill as charge for their using eight kilometre of the local gas pipeline for the gas supply.

Shell-Cairn argued that the eight per cent deduction was exorbitant and unacceptable. It asked Petrobangla to 'rationalise' the pipeline rental charges, which Petrobangla did not agree with. The oil companies then sought international mediation.

The oil companies calculated that through the deduction Petrobangla has 'deprived' them \$38 million in payment.

Shell-Cairn was contractually obligated to set up this pipeline. But to fulfil the prime obligation for meeting the deadline for Sangu gas production, the oil companies launched their gas production using

the local pipeline belonging to the Bakhrrabad Gas Transmission Systems.

John Burns, the consultant, also gave an opinion on another allegation of Shell Oil that Petrobangla has violated an agreement by not purchasing 160 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas. It said Petrobangla purchased around 128 mmcf gas, and in the process slowed down Shell's recovery of investment.

Power failure

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Development Board (PDB) said there was a shortage of power generation as two units at Ghorashal Power Plant were 'down' due to overhauling of one and emergency maintenance of another.

"Despite the possibility of additional generation of power, the situation is unlikely to improve shortly due to lack of infrastructural capacity of DESA," an official said.

He said PDB is likely to add 210 MW from one the two units now 'down' from tomorrow.

Agitated CU students

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Of them, Murad was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and four others were given first aid at different city clinics. The injured railway personnel were admitted to the Railway Hospital.

Different students organizations in separate statements condemned police action on the students.

BCL in its statement also alleged that during the barricade some Shibir activists attacked the students taking sticks from policemen.

According to witnesses, the CU-bound shuttle train having six compartments left Chittagong railway station at 7.20am yesterday.

Panchlaish thana police, however, denied any action against the students.

The arrest was made following the incident, police said.

Meanwhile, the general students of Chittagong University (CU) called for an indefinite siege programme on the campus protesting police action on the agitating students following a shuttle-train accident.

The students under the banner of 'Sadharan Chhatra Parishad' called for the siege programme here yesterday (Tuesday). The students became agitated as police swooped on them while they were demanding renovation of the rail tracks.

Witnesses said, police clubbed several students while they (students) were putting up barricades on the roads.

Witnesses further said, police reportedly backed by a faction of JCD, kicked three general students.

Chittagong University syndicate was holding an emergency meeting to review the situation. The meeting was going on till filing of this report at 7.30pm.

Earlier, the students put up a barricade on Chittagong-Rangamati-Khagrachhari road at University Gate No. 1.

The barricades were withdrawn following an assurance by Pro-VC Mohammad Shamsuddin to provide the students with ten buses to carry them to and from Sholoshahar Railway Station area.

The Pro-VC also assured that measures would be taken to renovate the rail tracks upto the univer-

Govt-backed criminals killed Siddhartha Sarker: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina accused government-backed armed criminals of killing Tejacon College Chhatra League leader Siddhartha Sarker.

"The criminals let loose by the BNP-Jamaat government brutally murdered him in a preplanned way," she said in a statement yesterday.

Hasina demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment to the killers of Sarker, general secretary of Tejacon College Students Union, killed in a shootout in the city on Sunday night.

The opposition leader alleged that the alliance government, after assuming power through a rigged election on October 1 last year, created a reign of terror in the country.

"But Awami League's forward march cannot be halted by unleashing such killings, attacks, rapes and torture," she said with a note of caution for the half-year-old coalition government.

She said the 'fascist' ruling alliance led by Khaleda Zia was perpetrating repressive acts on the leaders and workers of Awami League and its front organisations across the country.

Meanwhile, the Awami League chief in a condolence message expressed deep shock at the death of valiant freedom fighter and secretariat member of MuktiJoddha Command Council Maj (Retd) Golam Mowla.

"We have lost a real freedom fighter and the loss is irreparable," she said and prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

She conveyed her heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Spice tonic

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supplied by the England football team's official entertainment supplier amazon.co.uk.

"In the past we've found players have had a lot of time on their hands in the run up to and in between games," said the FA's marketing director Paul Barber on Tuesday.

"Sitting around waiting to play or train can often increase the players nerves, but we now have ammunition to keep players entertained and relaxed throughout the entire campaign."

The contents of the package were selected with the help of a sports psychologist, the FA and a number of players.

It also includes a Japanese phrasebook, a video of England's 1966 World Cup final win, the films Gladiator and The Great Escape, and music by Robbie Williams.

England have been drawn in World Cup group F along with Argentina, Sweden and Nigeria. They play Sweden in their opening game on June 2 in Saitama.

Graft case

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quashed the case after hearing the arguments of the prosecution and defence.

Deputy Attorney General Saidur Rahman argued that there was no corruption in the appointment of SIs. The age limit of the SIs was relaxed during the appointment since the government had canceled the appointment of 227 SIs during the rule of the caretaker government in 1991.

Advocate Khandakar Mahbubuddin of the defence also came up with same argument.

The High Court quashed another corruption case against Khaleda in October last after the BNP came to power. However, the prime minister is facing one more corruption case regarding the purchase of an Airbus.

War games

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"This offer was a splendid act of solidarity with the American people at a time of urgent need," she told Indian business leaders in a speech that did not touch on India's relations with Pakistan.

"South Asia is a key front in the global war on terrorism," she said. "Dismantling the structure of extremism and terror must go hand in hand with addressing and eliminating its root causes."

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said India did not plan to attack Pakistan, despite provocation, at least until after elections in India's Jammu-Kashmir state, which are expected in September.

"We do not want the elections to be disrupted at any cost," The New York Times quoted Fernandes as saying, in its yesterday's editions. He is the only senior Indian official to publicly say there will be no early military action.

India's Defense Ministry issued its annual report Monday in which it said there had been no letup in the infiltration of Pakistan-based militants across the cease-fire line that divides Kashmir.

"Pakistan has been found to be an epicentre of Islamic fundamentalism and her actions (have) added a new dimension to state-sponsored terrorism," the Defense Ministry report said.

The report said Pakistan is the primary source for arms to Kashmiri militants and that Islamabad was "continuing with its policy of sponsoring terrorism in other parts of India, too."

Murky way to millions

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readers of Titas, but they can do little. They cannot be punished, tried or even reprimanded.

However, not all metre readers hog the limelight. In fact, some 20 of them are big shots. Mahbubur Rahman is 'one proud son' of Titas.

Mahbub was arrested on April 27 at the Zia International Airport before he and his family was to board a Singapore-bound plane with a passport that says he is a businessman. However, police could not detain him for long as a top political leader intervened.

The police are yet to take any action against him. Titas gas made a futile attempt to do something about him by forming an investigation committee. The committee members were however nominated by Mahbub himself!

The Daily Star probed Rahman's career and the source of his immense wealthhe owns one building and the land on which it is built and two flats in Purana Paltan in the city, two industries and a car. He has had a Titas gas jeep assigned to him full time.

The probe reveals that he made the fortune simply by tampering gas metres of the industries located in Narayanganj, Munshiganj and Narsingdi areas.

"He gets gas bills reduced to a ridiculous level by helping the unscrupulous industries clock back the meter. And, he gets 'handsome commissions' from the industry owners," said a source.

That's not all -- he also provides by-pass connections to industries in return for 'heavy commissions'.

Such ill-gotten wealth has made Mahbub so powerful that the Titas gas authorities do not want to bother him. He is the Vice-President of the Titas Gas Jatityatabadi Sramik Union and tells people that he is very close to a BNP policymaker.

When he was arrested on April 27, an assistant of the said BNP policymaker called the police and asked them to release him. Previously on February 6, the Narayanganj thana police arrested him on criminal charges. Again, he was released on the same day due to political intervention.

Mahbub often goes abroad, his

Chargesheeted

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involved in illegally allowing the other accused Ashok Kumar Bishwas to participate in the 20th BCS examinations, under the quota for "tribal people" producing fake documents. Ashok allegedly submitted papers showing him as a son of tribal people.

The four accused also helped Ashok to get the post of assistant commissioner, the FIR said.

In the second case filed with Kafrul thana, it has been alleged that four of the accused were involved in illegally allowing the other accused, Nabirul Islam, to participate in the 20th BCS examinations under the 'freedom fighters' children, quota, producing false documents. Nabirul Islam allegedly submitted papers showing him as a son of freedom fighter although his father was not a freedom fighter.

The four accused also helped Nabirul Islam to get the post of district cooperative officer, the FIR said.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) filed the cases with Kafrul Police on December 11 last year accusing the five persons.

Kashmir militants

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unmask the motives of their perpetrators."

A little-known rebel group called al-Mansourain claimed responsibility for yesterday's attack in a telephone call to the NAFA news agency in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

But an army official alleged it was the work of Jaish-e-Mohammad, a hardline movement blamed in part by India for the parliament attack. The group, known for suicide bombings, was later banned by Pakistan.

"The identities of the militants could not be ascertained, but it is believed they are from Jaish-e-Mohammad," Major General Mohan Pandey, who commands the 26th infantry, told AFP.

The militants had boarded a bus from Himachal Pradesh state en route to Jammu.

"At 6:10 am local time, they opened indiscriminate fire in the bus and lobbed a grenade," Pandey said.

Seven bus passengers, four of them women, were killed in the bloodbath at Kaluchak, some 15 kilometres south of Jammu, he said.

A guard at a nearby army camp spotted three guerillas as they ran out of the bus and opened fire on them. One rebel was killed, but the others sneaked into the army camp's residential quarter, where they began shooting at soldiers' family members, officials said.

"Some of them bolted their doors from inside, but the militants tried to open the doors and were shooting at the family members," Pandey said.

The army retaliated by firing rockets at a nearby house where the militants were believed to have taken refuge. The operation was over by 10:00 am (0430 GMT) with all three rebels dead, Pandey said.

The army camp mostly housed women and children, as the bulk of the soldiers had been deployed to the disputed border with Pakistan.

The buildings were devastated

last trip in December took him to New Zealand. The passport seized by the immigration authorities had about a dozen visas.

Mahbub recently applied to the Titas authorities for gas connection to his industry named Sarkar Chemicals. He is now moving the files himself.

Previously its name was Century Chemicals, an industrial unit officially owned by his wife and father. But as the industry defaulted on payment of gas bills worth Tk 1.5 crore to Titas, he renamed it. The authorities are even not trying to recover the outstanding.

A high official of Titas, on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that there were more than one such "Mahbub" in Titas who have greatly 'contributed' to an all time high level of systems loss. According to the latest report, systems loss in Titas in January stood at 12.05 per cent -- highest since its inception.

The official said everyday these metre readers steal gas worth half a crore taka. And, Titas is sinking now. According to a government estimate, everyday gas worth Tk 48 lakh is being pilfered. A task force has been set up to resist such pilferage. But none is co-operating with the task force fearing the wrath of powerful, corrupt leaders like Mahbub.

When The Daily Star reached Mahbub over his cell phone and asked him yesterday what he has to say about the corruption charges, he denied those. "Most gas theft takes place in the Narayanganj zone. The government has formed a task force in this regard and I am helping it. As many are being affected by the probe of the task force, they are spreading rumours against me," quipped Mahbub.

Asked how he amassed so much wealth, he said, "My forefathers had businesses. I did not have my Titas job for sometime. During that time, I was did a business."

"I don't own a car," he said when asked about the expensive car. When it was pointed out to him that his wife owns it, Mahbub retorted, "Why ask me then?"

When asked why he frequently travels abroad, he said, "I was thrown off the Titas Bhaban's third floor in 1992 and was injured. I am still suffering from that injury. I have to go abroad for treatment."

Asked why he identifies himself as a businessman in the passport, he said, "Can I not do business?"

When questioned why he works as a metre reader since he is well-off he said, "How long have I been with Titas? I joined Titas in 1987, and I could not work for 11 years due to termination and injury. The present government has given me the job back... I don't want to work here. Everyone is conspiring against me."

The Daily Star also found that all the property has been acquired over the last three or four years although Mahbub says he inherited those. He also said he has been doing business for five years.

Profile

Real name: Mahbubur Rahman
Passport name: Bhuuiyan Mahbubul Alam (passport number: K271847, profession business)

Father's name: Abdus Salek Bhuuiyan

Permanent address: Village-Kararchar, Post office- Kararchar High School, Upazilla- Shibpur, District-Narsingdi

Present address: Eastern Eden Flat-1/401, 3/A Purana Paltan

Career: Joined Titas as Junior Meter Reader (code- 771-08233) on May 23, 1987

Present position: Presently

deputed in Narayanganj

Suspended in April 23, 1996

Terminated in March 12, 1998

Reinstated in November 24, 2001

Current pay scale Tk 3,735

Property

Four katha land with a three-storey four-unit building in 72, Rasulpur, Dhania
A 1400 square feet flat in Eastern Eden, 1/401, 3/A Purana Paltan
A 2000 square feet flat, centrally air conditioned, in 3B Purana Paltan (used for his business)

Industry: Messrs Cotton Touch, Kararchar Shipbur (On paper his father and wife own it)

Industry: Messrs Sarkar Chemicals, Kararchar, Shibpur (On paper the father, wife and another person own it)
Car: Toyota Corolla (Number: Ga-14-1031. Registration address: Mrs. Afroza Khanam (wife of Mahbub), 3/1 Purana Paltan. Dated February 13, 2000)

Jeep: Dhaka Metro Gha-02-3098, owned by Titas but illegally used full time by Mahbub. After office hours, the jeep is often kept at Mahbub's residence

BNP activist murdered in Barisal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

BNP activist was stabbed to death allegedly by his rivals in Natun Bazar area of South Rakudia under Babuganj upazila on Monday night.

According to police and witnesses, Nasir, 40, was stabbed by a gang of ten while he was returning home. He died on the spot.

Police said Nasir might have been killed by his rivals over a dispute on supplying construction materials for under-construction Doarika-Shikarpur village on Dhaka-Barisal road.

Nasir was a listed criminal and accused in several cases, police said.

2 garment factory workers killed in bus mishap

UNB, Gazipur

A bus carrying the workers of a garment factory overturned at Polashbari on Nabinagar-Kaliakoir road in Savar yesterday killing two female workers.

Police said Rokeya, 22, and Bilkis, 21, died on the spot and 20 other workers of Dada Bangladesh Limited in Savar EPZ sustained injuries as the bus overturned while it was trying to overtake another bus at about 7.45 am.

Fifteen of the injured were admitted to Gono Shyastha Kendra. The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Dragnet

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On Monday night, police with the backup of the BDR arrested listed criminals Faruq Jalal and Rizvi.

Traffic police have also joined forces with the mainstream law enforcers to help improve law and order. Law enforcers started intercepting and checking vehicles.

The home ministry keeps a watchful eye on the situation. All police stations and law enforcers engaged in raids have been asked to take tough action against the criminals.

Police yesterday seized six revolvers, one pipe-gun, 16 bullets and three cocktails.

Pay VAT

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Insurance Company -- Tk 32 lakh, City General Insurance Company -- Tk 56 lakh, Meghna Insurance Company -- Tk 2.75 crore, Janata Insurance Company-- Tk 2.38 crore, Eastern Insurance Company --Tk Nine lakh, Central Insurance Company -- Tk 5.12 crore, Prime Insurance Company -- Tk 2.43 crore, Phoenix Insurance Company -- Tk 71 lakh and East Land Insurance Company --Tk 23 lakh.

Officials of the companies, however, termed the evaded VAT as 'outstanding' VAT.

They said the VAT remained 'outstanding' because of some 'informal systems' developing in the market over the years.

"Earlier, there was a system of doing business on credit and huge amounts of premium remained outstanding. So we could not pay VAT," said Abul Kashem Chowdhury, General Manager of Provati Insurance Company.

"Now the government has prohibited doing business on credit and we are following it," he said.

None of the companies evaded VAT intentionally, he claimed.

Abdul Haq, senior executive vice president of Federal Insurance Company, said, "We have been paying VAT regularly. Some amount remained due and we pay it in installments."

Matir Moina banned

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Tareque Masud, who grew up in a village and was educated in a madrassah, in the backdrop of the rising mass movement of the late sixties.

"I made the movie as a fellow Muslim and wanted to inform people about the life in a madrassah that has both strict and liberal teachers," director Tareque Masud told The Daily Star late April.

But on May 9, the Film Censor Board (FCB) of the Ministry of Information in a letter to Tareque Masud said the film should not be projected in the public as it contains materials religiously sensitive.

The letter said the film's prayer for censor certificate has been cancelled under the Section of FCB Code 16(5). It, however, said an appeal for further consideration could be submitted.

Director Tareque Masud and Producer Katherine Masud are now on a visit to France. Tareque was notified about the FCB's refusal to issue certificate. Tareque and Katherine will appeal for reconsideration of the FCB's decision, the sources said.

Information Secretary Mirza Tosaddak Hossain Beg meanwhile told the BBC Bangla service that there would be no problem, if the film is screened at the Cannes festival.

"I did not find anything objectionable that could hurt religious sentiments," a member of the censor board, who watched the film during its first screening on May 27, told The Daily Star.

During the first screening, eight board members watched the film. Six members suggested that the film be released uncut, one refrained from commenting on it and the other gave a note of dissent for verification of recitation of the verses from the holy Qur'an in the film.

Later, the board decided that the

film must be screened before the full board. However, the board did not take any step to re-screen it. Information Minister Toriqul Islam, Secretary Mirza Tosaddak Hossain Beg, Vice-Chairman of the FCB, Director General of the Film Development Board and other officials on Monday watched the film.

The film was placed before the FCB on April 21 for certificate, sources said.

Meanwhile, the film has received tremendous response from the French media and film critics at the Cannes. They praised the film for depicting Bangladesh as a land of religious tolerance and tremendous cultural diversity. Contrary to the image of Bangladesh, as recently portrayed by a section of western media, the film depicts Bangladeshi society as a liberal Muslim one, they observed.

The movie has been acclaimed for its technical excellence at the Cannes Film Festival, the sources added.

Bhomra

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Sources said police were deployed to ensure security in the port area.

Offices of all departments at the port were kept shut yesterday, customs officials said.

After reviewing the situation, the National Board of Revenue (NBR), the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Establishment directed the authorities to suspend border trade in the port indefinitely.

The widow of the nearby Luxmidari village (name withheld) in a confessional statement to the magistrate accused Habibur Rahman Habi of forcing her to be photographed with the customs superintendent the same night.

Habibur Rahman Habi was backed by the local lawmaker and an armed gang, she alleged.

Next Indian president

FROM PAGE 12
Congress Party headed by Sharad Pawar and Jayalalitha-led AIADMK (ruling Tamil Nadu state) if a contest becomes unavoidable.

Yet, NDA last week authorised Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to work out a consensus on Presidential choice. Vajpayee has already begun consultations.

Among the names that are still doing rounds are Narayanan and Krishan Kant, the present Vice President. The latest name to join the buzz is P C Alexander, a close aide of late Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and now the Governor of Maharashtra state ruled by Congress-NCP coalition.

The Congress and Left Parties favour a second term for Narayanan, a former Congressman. Congress spokesman S Jaipal Reddy indicated this yesterday when he said "Narayanan has been one of the exceptionally good Presidents the country has had."

But it is not yet clear if BJP would be agreeable to Narayanan's continuance at Rashttrapati Bhawan (Presidential Palace), especially after his veiled criticism of Vajpayee government in some of his official speeches on different occasions in his first stint as President.

Bridge on Karnaphuli

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development of little use," he added.

The Chittagong-Dohazari section remains one of a "poor utility" with a negligible number of passengers and construction of an indispensable road bridge is sure to make the rail-road bridge of little importance he said.

"However, the proposal for renovation was made and we will be looking forward to address any inconvenience and consider any suggestion from any quarter in this regard," he told The Daily Star. The Railway had already taken a project for extending the Chittagong-Dohazari section up to the Dohazari-Cox's Bazar, he added.

The preliminary works and survey of the Dohazari-Cox's Bazar Track Extension Project has already been completed and the PCP has been submitted for further necessary government approval. The feasibility studies and financing of the project might cost Tk. 800 crore.

"With the completion of this extension project that aims at operating more trains and introducing wagons in this route, apart from renovating the Kalurghat bridge we will need to construct another bridge on the Karnaphuli," Engineer Quasem said. "A proposal for such a new bridge with an estimated cost of Tk. 166 crore has been sent to the higher authority and the authority is actively considering it, he added."

Meanwhile, in a bid to raise a glimmer of hope the Roads & Highway (R&H) authorities took an initiative to construct a cable-bridge on the river.

The bridge got ECNEC approval early this year and the tender, seeking technical and financial offer for the 1000-metre bridge to be completed within three years involving some Tk 500 crore, was floated.

But conditions of the tender schedule raised some controversy that slowed down the implementation of the construction plan of the

bridge.

An unofficial proposal for construction of a multi-purpose bridge on the Karnaphuli like the Jamuna Multi-purpose bridge as a joint-venture project of Railway and R&H was made.