

Morshed, Powell talk gas export, RMG issues

UNB, Dhaka

The question of gas export, access of Bangladesh apparels to US market, India-Pakistan tension and the situation in Afghanistan came up for discussion at the talks between Foreign Minister Morshed Khan and his US counterpart Colin Powell in Washington.

Morshed Khan termed his talks "excellent and useful," saying that it would strengthen Dhaka-Washington bilateral cooperation.

Talking to UNB over phone from Washington, DC, he said bilateral and regional matters were discussed during the talks held at the US State Department on Monday.

When Powell wanted to know Bangladesh's position on the India-Pakistan conflict, the Foreign Minister said, "Bangladesh always wants resolution of the problem through constructive dialogue."

He said Dhaka was also ready to extend possible assistance for defusing tension in the region.

In reply to a question, the Foreign Minister said the issue of SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) was neither raised nor discussed at any level of the talks.

On the contentious question of export of natural gas, Khan told Powell that Bangladesh would need to determine its actual reserve as well as domestic requirements and utilisation.

The government, he said, is taking steps one after another and then the question of export would be considered by parliament.

Later, Bangladesh Ambassador to Washington Syed Hasan Ahmed told UNB that Colin Powell assured that the US government would certainly keep in mind Bangladesh's demand for free access of RMG to the US market.

On the Afghan issue, the Ambassador said, Bangladesh has already joined the international

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N'ganj bomb tragedy: GD filed against 58 AL, JP men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A general diary (GD) was filed with Narayanganj thana in connection with a bomb explosion at Chashara AL office in June 2001.

Mohammad Kamal, son of Halima Khatoun, one of the victims, filed the GD accusing 58 AL and Jatiya Party leaders and activists including the complainant of the first case and general secretary of Narayanganj town AL Khokon Saha, former MP A K M Shamin Osman, his two brothers -- Nasim Osman (JP-leader) and Selim Osman and nephew Ajmiri Osman for their alleged involvement in the incident.

Narayanganj police sent a copy of the GD to ASP Aminul Islam of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police, who is investigating the case, for further action.

HSC exams on May 26 rescheduled

UNB, Dhaka

As the government declared public holiday on May 26 on the occasion of Eid-e-Miladunnabi, the HSC, Alim, Fazil, Kamil and HSC (Vocational and Business Management) examinations scheduled for the day will be held on June 18.

The education boards will notify the subject-wise timetable of the examinations in due course, said an official handout.

Petrobangla refutes Unocal's compensation payment claim

SHARIER KHAN

Petrobangla officials have rejected the claim by Unocal Bangladesh's chief Scott A Barber that the company has 'settled' through a supplementary agreement the issue of compensation for damage of a gas reserve in the Magurchhara explosion.

"Nowhere in the Supplementary Agreement signed in 1998, it is mentioned that the agreement or any clause of the agreement was made to compensate the gas loss in Magurchhara," a high official of Petrobangla noted.

"The state minister (for energy) is unwilling to submit Petrobangla's gas damage compensation claim to Unocal. It seems that nothing had happened in Magurchhara," commented a top official.

Another official observed that Unocal was unwilling to pay any amount of compensation and it has the support of a section in the government. Petrobangla was about to file a compensation claim with Unocal for damaging Magurchhara gas field.

"If Unocal finds the claim irrational, why is it afraid of receiving Petrobangla's letter on the issue?" the official asked. "The claims were not based on imagination. There was an official probe committee report that included even the opinion of an Occidental expert."

This is the second time Unocal has made such a claim. The first time the company came up with such a strange claim in 2000 through a printed document in which it said it 'paid' Bangladesh Taka 332.32 crore as compensation for the blowout. When Petrobangla warned Unocal not to give

such fictitious figures, the company went silent about it.

This time, as Petrobangla had processed an official letter to claim Taka 3900 crore as compensation for damaging a gas structure in Magurchhara having an estimated 245 billion cubic feet (BCF) of gas, the company went into an offensive.

Firstly, when Petrobangla was about to deliver the letter to Unocal, it lobbied with the state minister for energy so that it is not delivered. The state minister then asked Petrobangla to stop the process on the plea of further scrutinising the legal sides of the claims. The letter was already approved twice by the energy ministry and twice by the Petrobangla Board.

Then on Sunday, Scott A Barber told the UNB, "The supplementary agreement awarded the Petrobangla additional five per cent gas discovered by us in block number 14."

He also said that Unocal had settled all legitimate claims and only environmental damage claim remained pending as the environment ministry took 18 months to agree to appoint a third party internationally recognised expert to assess the damage.

The Unocal chief also termed the blowout as a mere accident. "We were sorry then and we are sorry now. But the claim that 245 BCF gas was burnt is totally unrealistic," UNB quoted Barber as saying.

But facts say different things.

Unocal's predecessor Occidental had begun the drilling in Magurchhara on June 2, 1997. That was its first drilling since it signed a production sharing

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Talks on private container terminal in Ctg stalled

SHAHRIAR KARIM

Fresh negotiations between the government and the Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) on building a private container terminal in Chittagong reached a 'deadlock' over four issues yesterday.

The issues are terms and conditions of BOT (build, operate and transfer), rate of royalty, ceiling on capacity of the terminal and ceiling and floor of tariff, meeting sources said.

"If the SSA does not agree to our terms and conditions, then we have to say goodbye to it," a government negotiator told The Daily Star yesterday.

A secretary level committee was given the task of renegotiating with the SSA. Earlier on April 30, the committee submitted a report to the

government on the relevant issues.

The government negotiators and SSA representatives sat at 8:00 am yesterday to hammer out a solution and the meeting continued till about 10.30 am. Representatives of the SSA found the government conditions 'not agreeable,' sources said.

However, the two sides agreed on some peripheral issues. These include studies on the project site to determine whether there would be any siltation in the estuary of the Karnaphuli if the container terminal is built. The government and the SSA would conduct separate studies.

Earlier, the government offered the SSA to build a terminal on BOT basis when the fresh negotiations started on Saturday. The SSA offered to hand over the terminal to Bangladesh authorities after 60

years of operation but the government side found it unacceptable.

The SSA also wants that there should not be any bar on handling containers at the terminal to be built by it, but the government wants to ensure that the Chittagong port does not face difficulties in getting job, the sources said.

The government side also said the SSA authorities cannot charge less than or more than 50 per cent of what the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) is charging for container handling.

The two sides also differed on the rate of royalty the government is to get from the SSA. Earlier, the SSA proposed four per cent royalty on gross revenue and the government asked it to raise the rate.

The secretaries of the ministries

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Pasha placed on 5-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Notorious criminal Kamal Pasha alias Pasha, arrested on Monday, was placed on five days' police remand yesterday for interrogation.

Detective Branch (DB) police produced Pasha, 30, an accused in at least half a dozen murder cases, before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka at about 4pm with a prayer for 10 days' remand.

Pasha was shown arrested in the case in connection with the killings of two brothers -- Syed Ashraf Jewel and Syed Mohammad Rivel -- at Mohammadpur in the city in May 2000.

The case is now pending with the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka.

In the forwarding report, police

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Meghna launch capsizes Two shipping dept staff suspended

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The shipping ministry yesterday suspended two staff of the Department of Shipping and asked three others to explain their action on charge of negligence in duty regarding MV Salahuddin-2 capsizing in Meghna on May 3.

The ministry also decided to file cases against the owner of the capsized ship and cancelled its registration, route permit and time table, shipping ministry sources said.

The ministry also directed the department to file departmental cases against the suspended staff -- Shafiqur Rahman, inspector and AKM Fakhru Islam, engineer and ship surveyor -- for overlooking their duty.

The officers served with show-cause notices as Chief Inspector Rajendranath Biswas, Chief Engineer and Ship Surveyor Matur Rahman and Principal Officer of

Mercantile Marine Department (POMMD) Abdul Huq.

The ministry action follows the submission of report by the probe committee that blames the accident on Shafiqur Rahman, Fakhru Islam and Matur Rahman and the ship owner.

The ministry also served show-cause on two others it thought to be involved in the incident.

Inspector Shafiqur Rahman, who was on duty at Sadarghat on May 3, was blamed for gross negligence to take any step against MV Salahuddin-2, which left the Sadarghat Launch Terminal with over 400 passengers beyond its capacity.

Fakhru Islam, engineer and ship surveyor, was suspended as he recently surveyed the ship but did not detect the structural deviations in the vessel.

POMMD Abdul Huq, who is to retire from the service in about a month, first surveyed the vessel MV Salahuddin-2.

Jahangir murder case Shikdar, 'Jamai' Faruque, Liakat get life term

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Ershad Ali Shikdar, Jamai Faruque and Liaquat Lashkar have been awarded life imprisonment in the sensational Jahangir Master murder case.

Accused Sultan Mahmud and Noor-e-Alam have been acquitted of the charge.

Additional District and Sessions Judge (One) Mohammad Didar Ali Fakir gave the verdict at 3:30 pm yesterday.

The judge also fined the convicts Tk 20,000 each, in default, to suffer three more years in jail.

Ershad, Liakat Lashkar, Jamai Faruque and Noor-e-Alam were present in the court during the judgement. Sultan Mahmud who was on bail also appeared before the court.

According to prosecution, Jahangir Kabir, son of Abul Mansur

of Rupsha upazila was a house tutor of Shikdar's family. He reportedly developed illicit affair with Shikdar's first wife Khodeja Begum.

When suspicion grew stronger in Shikdar's mind, he planned to kill

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 22		6-37 pm
May 23	5-13 am	

Prayer Timings		
May 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-44
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		



PHOTO: STAR

Female students of Chittagong Medical College stage a sit-in for the second day yesterday in front of the principal's office demanding immediate steps to resolve accommodation problem at the lone female hostel. The students also protested the authorities' move to turn two reading rooms of the hostel into dormitories for freshers.

'Business interest, not moral ground led to channel ban'

REAZ AHMAD

Business interests of a vested quarter instead of the much-vaunted moral reasons worked behind the government's banning some popular satellite channels on Sunday, sources in the cable business said yesterday.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the sources said that a certain quarter zeroed in on the burgeoning satellite channel business involving crores of taka and moved to push the two existing distributors out of their monopoly trade.

Meanwhile, a day after reopening of the banned channels, television viewers in many parts of Dhaka

are still deprived of enjoying the satellite channels as connections of some cable operators were snapped due to a persisting conflict between the cable operators and distributors.

General viewers have to suffer a lot because of this conflict as, some sources pointed out, some gangsters using political identities have got involved in cable business in recent months.

Due to snapping of connections by one of the two distributors, viewers in some 20,000 households in old part of the city and Dhanmondi, Jigatola, Lalmatia, Kalabagan, Azimpur, BUET and Dhaka University areas now cannot watch

most of the pay channels excepting ESPN, Star Sports and Home Box Office (HBO).

Sources said, some 3200 members and associate members of Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh (COAB) get monthly subscription fees of Taka 200 to Taka 500 from each household connection. For pay channels, two distributors -- M/S Nationwide Communication and M/S Translink--together get roughly Tk four crore a month from the cable operators.

Attracted by the huge sums of money the satellite business involves, certain quarters were trying to get into the market for quite

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Road accidents kill 8 in Natore, Sirajganj

UNB, Natore, Sirajganj

Eight people were killed and three others injured in road accidents in Natore and Sirajganj districts yesterday.

In Natore, five people, including a woman were killed, in a road accident at Kadamchilan in Lalpur upazila on Pabna-Natore highway yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred when a Rajshahi-bound truck from Kazir Hat in Pabna skidded off the road and fell into a ditch at Kadamchilan in Lalpur upazila at about 7:00 am.

The driver of the truck and four

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On-arrival visa ZIA immigration yet to get lists of countries

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign nationals and Bangladeshis having dual citizenship are facing hassle in getting on-arrival visa at ZIA and even denied entry as the immigration has not been given two lists of countries after introduction of new laws on April 18.

Nearly 200 foreign nationals have been turned back since introduction of the new rules, sources at ZIA said.

The new immigration rules allow on-arrival visa for citizens of countries having 'no-visa requirement protocols' with Bangladesh and for

spouses and children of investors and Bangladeshis having dual citizenship. Nationals of countries having consular facilities are also being denied entry if they do not procure entry certificate in advance.

But the immigration department at ZIA has not yet been provided with the two lists of countries with which Bangladesh has 'no-visa agreement' and where Bangladesh has resident mission or submissions or consular facilities.

The lists were to be provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Ministry of Foreign affairs.

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