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INSTALLATION OF GAS PIPELINES

Tk 30 cr being siphoned off by doubling project cost

SHARIEF KHAN with ZAYADUL AHSAN

Some Titas Gas company and Petrobangla officials in collusion with contractors are siphoning off at least Tk 30 crore by doubling the cost of gas pipeline installations under a project.

The role of State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain is unclear whether he is protecting the corrupt people working under the Bangabandhu Bridge Approach

Road Gas Pipeline Project (BBARGP).

His inaction after an official investigation pointed fingers at some corrupt officials raises questions about his role.

A liberal estimate of the cost of the pipeline laying suggested Tk 30 crore, but Petrobangla experts said the task could be completed with a cost below Tk 22 crore.

But 'corrupt officials' doubled the cost to Tk 60 crore and local

contractors began work on the project in October.

Although the contract was officially given to two companies, nine are sharing the tasks and profits, sources said.

A visit to the pipeline installation site reveals that the contractors are not complying with basic safety standards and are carrying out a substandard job.

The pipelines were supposed to be set up 'mechanically' to ensure

'high quality', but the workers are laying the pipes manually.

The raw installation in many places has resulted in pipe fractures, making the pipes prone to explosion during high-pressure gas flow, Petrobangla experts say.

The pipelines -- a 109 km one from Jaidevpur to Mirpur Bridge and the 101 km other from Kaliakoir to Garai Industrial area -- now carry potential threats to life and property.

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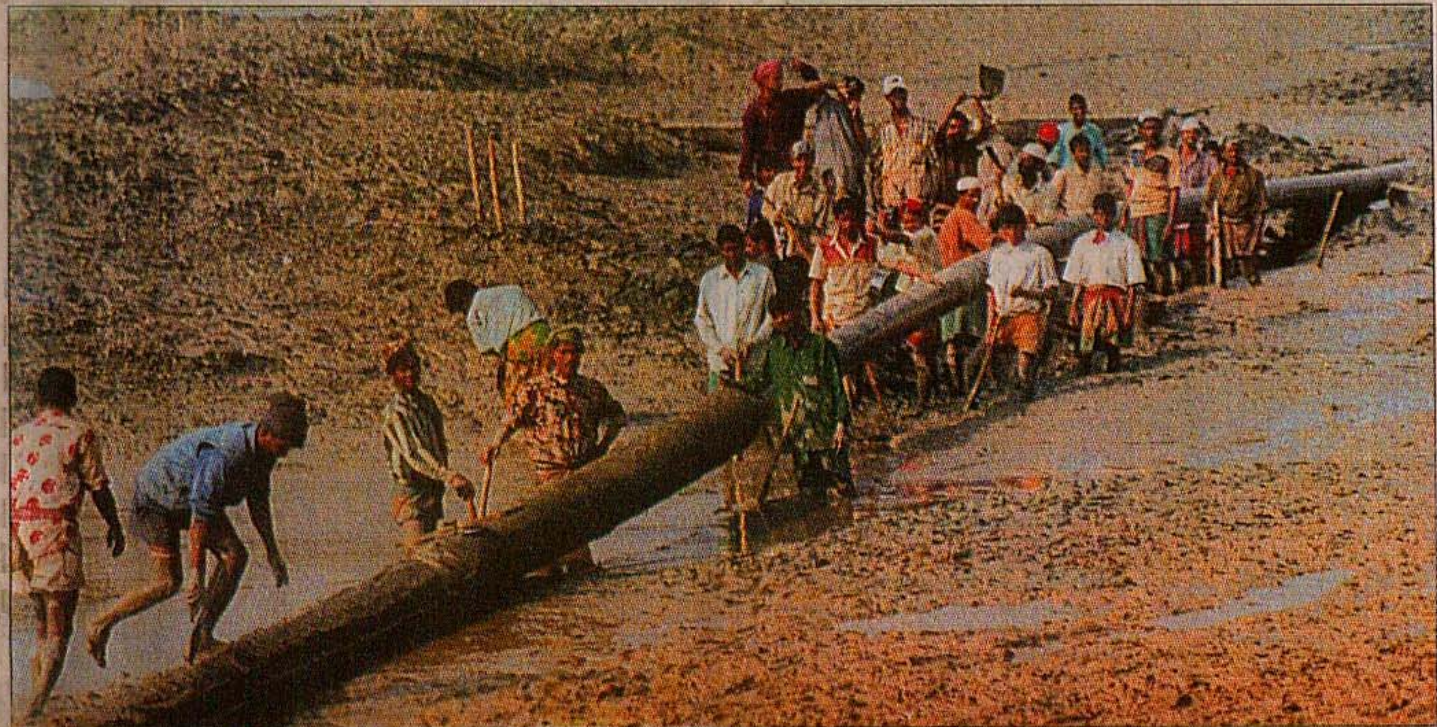


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Workers try to lay a gas pipeline under an over-priced project at Bailarpur in Savar manually, causing harm to the pipe that experts say may explode in high-pressure gas flow for the crude handling. The workers try to offset the damage through cement coating in a parody of the plan of mechanical laying for safety.

4 Dewanbagh pir's men hurt as bomb goes off in bus

Rival Charmonai followers blamed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four disciples of the Dewanbagh pir (religious guru) sustained bomb injuries when a crude bomb went off in a bus parked in front of the pir's office, Bab-e-Rahmat in the city's Arambagh area during the annual Ashke-e-Rasul conference yesterday.

In an immediate reaction, the Dewanbagh followers accused the Charmonai pir's disciples, who have been threatening to foil the conference, of hurling the bomb.

The injured -- Abdul Karim, 65, Sharir Ronny, 18, Nazmul Hasan, 13, and

M Anwar Hossain, 18 -- were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). As conditions of

Karim and Ronny deteriorated, they were shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital.

Apart from the bomb blast and the injuries it caused, the religious conference of Dewanbagh pir was held peacefully amidst tight security ensured by the pir's disciples and heavy police presence.

The anti-Dewanbagh group under the banner of Iman Aqida Sangrakkhan Committee (IASC) brought out a procession in the morning from Baitul Mukarram premises demanding ban on Dewanbagh pir's activities but police barricade stopped them from advancing beyond the Dainik Bangla crossing.

Regarding the bomb blast, Abdul Hamid, an assistant editor of the

Daily Inshariat, a mouthpiece of the Dewanbagh pir, said, "We are not sure about it, we suspect that the Charmonai disciples are behind the bomb blast, as they have been opposing our activities for a long time."

"Some 10 to 12 of us were waiting after the akheri munajat inside the bus (Comilla Ba-3701), parked near the Motijheel T&T Colony in front of our pir's office at 147, Arambagh at 3:15pm, when the bomb went off," said Anwar, one of the injured who hails from Comilla.

"I did not see anyone hurling the bomb," said Nazmul Hasan, one of the victims of the blast.

As the bomb exploded under a seat, splinters hit the passengers' heads.

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Young man shot dead in Demra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants gunned down a young man at Bahirtenga, Sarulia in Demra yesterday evening.

Police quoted family sources as saying a gang of four called Russell Mohammad Biddut, 25, out of his residence at about 6:30pm and shot him in the abdomen, chest and neck.

Fatally injured Biddut was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead. The body was kept at the hospital morgue for autopsy.

The duty officer of Demra Police Station confirmed the death, but failed to give details.

No case was filed till 9:00pm. Miscreants severed the wrist also of a young man in Demra yesterday.

The victim, Mohammad Liton, 23, is a mason and resident of Kajla.

A gang of four swooped on Liton while he was going to his work place at noon. They blindfolded Liton, took him to Bhangha Press and cut off the wrist of his right hand.

The miscreants fled the spot, leaving Liton in a pool of blood. He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and later shifted to Orthopaedic (Pongu) Hospital, hospital sources said.

4 killed, 15 hurt in Comilla road mishaps

UNB, Comilla

Four people were killed and 15 others injured in two separate road accidents in Burichang and Chowddagram upazilas on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway yesterday.

Police said the first accident occurred at about 3:00am at Kalakachua of Burichang upazila when a Chittagong-bound bus from Rangpur skidded off the road and fell into a ditch, killing two people on the spot and injuring 14 others. Identity of the dead and injured could not be known.

Two pedestrians were killed and another was critically injured when a Chittagong-bound bus ran them over during a head-on collision with a truck bound for Comilla at about 3:15pm at Amanganda in Chowddagram upazila.

The dead are Mainuddin, 14 and Sumi, 12. The injured, identified as Liton, 15, was admitted to hospital.

All-party consensus needed to increase parliament seats

Professionals observe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading academics, professionals and civil society members have expressed the view that the ruling four-party alliance should have taken the decision to increase the Jatiya Sangsad seats on the basis of discussion with all political parties.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, they observed that the unilateral decision to raise the number of parliamentary constituencies would widen the gap between the ruling and opposition parties and put additional burden on the public exchequer.

"It is not right on the part of the government to take a unilateral decision on raising parliamentary constituencies as it requires constitutional amendment," said Professor Mozaffar Ahmed, member of the trustee board of Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB). The government should first decide the number of people to be

represented by a member of parliament in the light of growing population, he said.

"A referendum should be held before increasing the constituencies and we also need to consider a bicameral parliament as the existing system is not functioning up to people's expectation," Mozaffar Ahmed said. All these things should be considered before bringing any amendment to the constitution, he added.

About proportional representation of political parties to the reserved seats for women, he said, "Proportional representation is not bad if it is implemented properly but

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Positive Bangladesh
See our special story titled 'the strength within' on page 12.

Int'l business confce kicks off today

STAR REPORT

A high profile international business conference begins in city today with policymakers and public and private sector business leaders from around the world meeting to contribute towards a revival of the multilateral trade talks.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the two-day meet on Global Economic Governance and Challenges of Multilateralism, organised by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)-Bangladesh.

Thai Premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who will fly in this morning to attend the conference, will present the keynote paper at the

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Janajuddha outlaws claim killing journalist Manik

Hartal in Khulna, Satkhira today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An unnamed caller to newspapers in Khulna yesterday claimed responsibility for the killing of prominent journalist Manik Chandra Saha in a bomb attack and branded him as a class enemy of an underground outfit in the southwestern district.

The caller told the newspapers the Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddha), a faction of the banned PBCP (Marxist-Leninist), carried out the attack on the senior staff correspondent of New Age on Thursday, the latest addition to a

series of journalist killings in the district since 2002.

The 50-year-old, also a BBC stringer, was heading home by rickshaw from Khulna Press Club when the handmade bomb blew the head off his body on Mirzapur Road, sending shock waves among people of all walks of life.

Khulna journalists enforce a daylong hartal in the metropolitan city today as part of a seven-day programme, followed by another called by the main opposition Awami League for tomorrow in protest at the murder that sparked a

torrent of condemnation.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) enforces a half-day hartal in Khulna and local journalists enforce another half-day round in Satkhira today.

In a faxed message to Khulna Press Club, Mofakker Chowdhury, self-styled secretary of the PBCP (Marxist-Leninist) central committee, condemned the murder and denied his group's links to the incident. "The killers of Manik have no intention but to dominate urban areas with killings."

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Transcom Group protests malicious news reports

The Bangladesh Electrical Industries Ltd., a unit of Transcom Group, has strongly protested the allegation of tax and duty evasion leveled against the company by some newspapers recently and termed such allegations as incorrect, distorted and motivated.

In a press release, issued by the Executive Director of the Bangladesh Electrical Industries Ltd., Obaidur Rahman Khan, yesterday referred to the news items published over the past few days in the "The Daily Jugantar", "The Daily Inqilab" and "The Independent" alleging evasion of import duty, tax and VAT by the Bangladesh Electrical Industries Ltd. and termed them as a deliberate campaign to malign the good name of the Transcom Group.

It said that neither none of these newspapers published any rejoinders nor did they bother to take any comments from the Bangladesh Electrical Industries Ltd. while writing their reports, which is a common journalistic practice. Only Jugantar made a sketchy reference to one of the rejoinders, the press release mentioned.

Clarifying the actual position the Bangladesh Electrical Industries Ltd. stated that:

The present consignment of 10 containers consists of 880 CKD (Completely Knocked Down/unassembled) refrigerator kits valued at Tk 78 Lacs. Each CKD kit (refrigerator) consists of more than 50 different parts and components packed separately. These have to go through 18-step assembly process to make finished, CBU (Complete Built Unit/ready for use) refrigerators in our factory. This assembly line for refrigerators was first established in October 2003 encouraged by the Government's policy in the current fiscal budget.

Prior to this Transcom only imported refrigerators in CBU (ready for use) condition.

The first consignment of 35 refrigerator kits in CKD condition

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Man bailed out despite non-bailable charge

CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

The chief metropolitan magistrate (CMM) in Dhaka has granted bail to a man charged with non-bailable offences under the Special Powers Act, triggering mixed reactions among lawyers.

The court premises were abuzz with lawyers' discussions on how or which way CMM Mohammad Ayub allowed the bail at the primary stage of investigation.

The CMM apparently took the recommendation of Abdul Mannan, ruling BNP lawmaker for Dhaka-10 constituency, into cognisance in allowing the bail on November 20 to Babul Akhter, charged with smuggling cellphone sets into Bangladesh.

Babul got the ad-interim bail on a bond of Tk 50,000 with the BNP leader, also a retired major, among two guarantors.

According to the allegation in the case filed with the Airport Police Station on November 3, Babul entered the VIP Lounge of Zia International Airport flying in from Hong Kong with two bags that customs officials scanned only to find 752 cellphone sets, worth about Tk 80 lakh.

The first information report (FIR) says Babul's friend Sheikh Mojibur Rahman Iqbal took him into the VIP lounge through the boarding bridge of the airport in an apparent bid to dodge tax.

Customs Inspector Wazed Ali seized the cellphone sets and filed a

case against Babul under Section 3 (1) of the Import and Export Control Act 1950, under Section 25 (B) of the Special Powers Act, 1974 and Sections 15, 16 and 32 of the Customs Act, 1969.

The Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate sent Babul to Dhaka Central Jail on November 7 after he was taken to court on expiry of a two-day remand.

The defence lawyer, praying for bail on November 13, told the court Babul was arrested on a 'trumped-up' charge, adding his client did not commit any crime, nor did he bring any illegal goods in.

"Babul declared to the customs the goods he brought with him and wanted to pay tax. But the customs

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Sarbaharas' surrender postponed as local MPs fail to show up

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The surrendering of the Sarbaharas arranged by Barisal police was postponed yesterday as two local members of parliament (MPs), special guests of the programme, failed to arrive at Barisal due to communication problem.

The much-publicised event was scheduled to take place at Agarpur High School playground in Babuganj upazila at 10:00am, where nearly 60 people belonging to the outlawed extremist group Sarbahara Party were expected to lay down arms to return to normal life.

Home Minister Atif Hossain

Chowdhury, chief guest of the ceremony, and Barisal City Corporation Mayor Mojibur Rahman Sarwar MP were awaiting Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal MP of Babuganj-Uzripur and Zahir Uddin Swapan MP of Agailjhara-Gourmadi at the Barisal Circuit House since 8:00am.

But, the home minister decided to postpone the programme as the two lawmakers informed that the GMG flight they were going to come by was called off due to heavy fog.

The home minister said a fresh date for the ceremony would be fixed and announced soon.

The postponement has triggered off apprehension among the locals

that the law and order may deteriorate further.

Just two days back, the authorities concerned renamed the programme as 'special meeting for reviewing the law and order situation', discarding mention of the Sarbaharas' surrender. That also made people suspicious and speculative about its fate.

Some of the assembled people said, if the MPs were really serious and sincere, they could travel down to Barisal by road in four hours. They expressed the suspicion that the MPs did not wish to end the clashes between Sarbahara factions in order

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Thick fog slows down communications

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Air, land and river communications were seriously affected yesterday due to reduced visibility as dense fog blanketed almost the entire country.

Thick fog delayed landing and take off of international and domestic flights.

International flights from Abu Dhabi, Karachi, Rome and Kuwait City of Gulf Airlines, Biman Bangladesh Airlines and Kuwait Airways arrived late at Zia International Airport (Zia) by six to ten hours.

Domestic flights of GMG Airlines from the capital to Barisal, Sylhet, Chittagong and Jessore were postponed. The evening flights of GMG Airlines to Sylhet and Chittagong also left behind schedule, flight information desk at Zia said.

Hundreds of passengers got stranded at the international and domestic terminals of Zia due to the unexpected change in the flight schedules. But eventually the terminals got cleared of the waiting crowd of passengers as the flights could leave one after another.

Gabtoli, Saydabad and Mahakhali inter-district bus terminals sources said passenger coaches that left early morning had to drive

slowly due to fog and slippery road surface.

Sadarghat launch terminal sources said all vessels left the capital on time but most of the launches from Barisal division arrived behind schedule, as those had to wait anchored during the previous night to avoid possible collision due to poor visibility.

The foggy weather with very mild drizzles that the country experienced yesterday was due to what meteorologists termed as 'western disturbance'.

The western disturbance was caused by low pressure from the west originating in the Mediterranean Sea and may continue today, a senior meteorologist told The Daily Star.

He said if drizzles continue today temperature may increase slightly over the next few days.

The 24 hours weather forecast said occasional drizzles with cloudy weather may continue today. It also said mild to moderate cold wave may sweep over Rajshahi division with mild to thick fog occurring in many places.

The sky is expected to remain mostly cloudy with fog occurring in early morning in Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions.



Musharraf to change house after killing attempts

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will shift his residence to Islamabad from neighbouring Rawalpindi to tighten security after two near-miss attempts on his life, a local newspaper reported yesterday.

Twice in December his motorcade was attacked as he travelled through crowded Rawalpindi, the first time from the airport and the second time on his way to Islamabad. He missed possible death by a matter of

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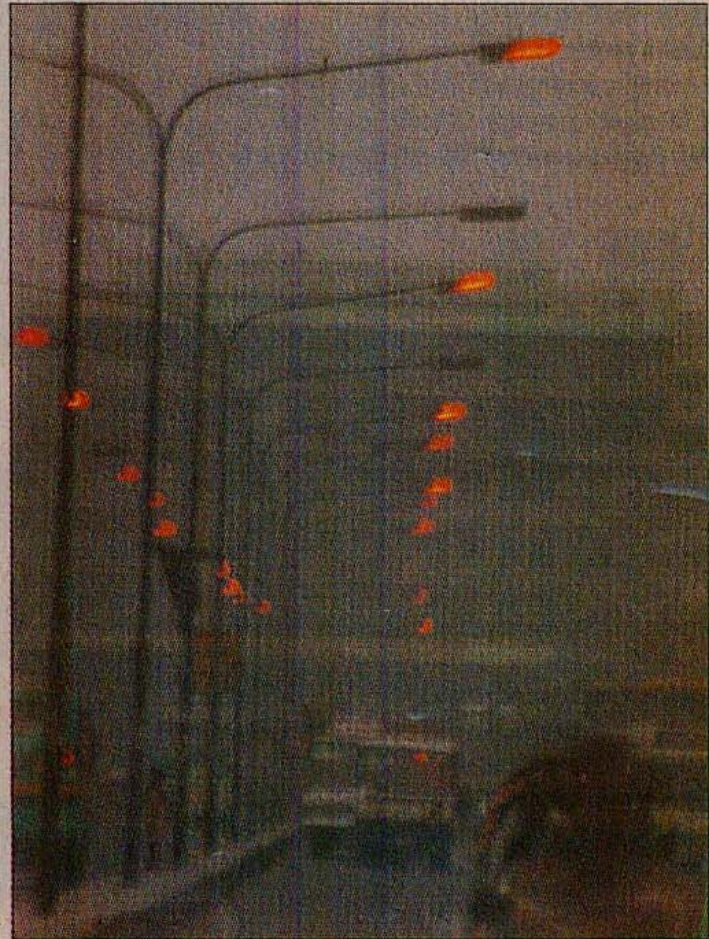


PHOTO: STAR

Sodium lights shine through a grey cloak of fog well ahead of dusk in Dhaka yesterday, as the sky remained overcast amid mild cold feel.