

Conditions set for tri-nation gas pipeline project

UNB, Dhaka

The government has put some conditions in allowing construction of a gas pipeline from Myanmar to West Bengal through Bangladesh territory.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Division (EMRD) prepared a draft for the proposed Myanmar-Tripura-Bangladesh-West Bengal gas pipeline project, official sources said.

The EMRD draft set certain stipulations like importing gas from Myanmar, when required, and keeping provision for transmission of Bangladesh's gas domestically or for export through the pipeline network for the trans-border project, they added.

It also laid stress on empowering Gas Transmission Company Limited, a company under state-run Petrobangla, for overall management of the proposed pipeline. Besides, the government will decide on its diameter.

The EMRD also advised to ensure that as little as possible land is acquired for the pipeline, which is proposed to run along highways.

The project came into limelight after the Congress-led government in India showed keen interest in this regard during Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan's visit to New Delhi last week.

During his visit, Morshed told Indian Petroleum Minister Mani

Shankar Aiyar that Dhaka is not reluctant to the idea of constructing Myanmar-India gas pipeline through Bangladesh's territory if it is done on 'mutually acceptable terms'.

India has been considering build the cross-border pipeline to pump gas from A-1 Myanmar offshore field in which Indian oil company ONGC-Videsh and Gail own a 30 percent stake, sources said.

Mohona Holdings, a Bangladeshi company, has proposed to build the proposed pipeline. Earlier, sources said that the Bangladesh government had turned down Mohona's proposal for the pipeline.

Energy division officials hinted that Bangladesh would earn about US\$ 125 million annually -- US\$ 100 million as wheeling charges and US\$ 25 million as maintenance charges -- from the proposed project.

Dhaka will also receive right of way revenue from the planned pipeline. A US\$ 150 million investment for the project will also create employment opportunity for Bangladeshis, they added.

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain told the news agency that experts have examined the particulars of the cross-country project and the EMRD proposal will be sent to the PM soon in a Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs meeting.

FM acquitted of graft charges

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka Court yesterday discharged Foreign Minister and former chairman of Arab Bangladesh (AB) Bank Ltd. M Morshed Khan and five others from a graft case.

Judge Rezaul Karim Khan of the Special Court for Dhaka Division passed the order as the charges brought against them were not proved.

Earlier, the defence lawyers had submitted a discharge petition to the court while the prosecution opposed it.

The five others are Abdur Rahim Chowdhury, former managing director of AB Bank Ltd., M Faizur Rahman, managing director of Asian Surveyors Ltd., Harun Ferdousi, proprietor of Marshal Services Ltd., Abdullah Al Mamun, executive director of Asian Surveyors Ltd., and Giasuddin Al Mamun of Rahman Group of Industries Ltd.

The case filed with Motiheel Police Station alleged that the accused received about Tk 3.5 crore in loan from the principal branch of the AB Bank producing 'forged documents' against the mortgaged property through 'abuse of power and mutual understanding'.

The loan was sanctioned for the purchase of Jadz Distillery Limited, a disinvested unit of Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha, it added.

It also alleged that the land mortgaged with the bank in 1994 was already sold out to another person and that the price of the land was inflated.

The bank officials, without surveying the land or examining the documents, recommended sanctioning of the loan, the case further said.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed the case accusing Morshed and eight others on October 19, 1996. The investigation officer pressed charges against Morshed and five others on December 13, 2000 showing 14 people as prosecution witnesses.

10 dalits killed

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Ravi Das. The body of another victim was yet to be identified, Lodha said.

A dispute over the running of the brick-kiln was stated to be the reason behind the attack, he said.

Vijay Kumar, proprietor of an adjoining brick-kiln, was taken into custody in this connection.

An FIR was lodged with the Ashwan police station in this connection.

Senior officials, including Lodha, were camping at the spot. Raids continued at different places to apprehend those involved in the killing.

Dy registrar

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local ward commissioner Golam Kuddus was also shot on May 4. There might be links between the two incidents, locals said.

The victim's son filed a case with Boalia Police Station, without accusing anybody. Police recovered a rifle butt and a used bullet from the spot yesterday morning.

The motive behind the killing was yet to be ascertained but local people and the victim's relatives and colleagues suspect the Jamaat leader was killed by hitmen hired by his political opponents.

Police sources however said the killing might be linked to the recent recruitment wrangle in the RU. The deputy registrar was handling the recruitment papers.

Police interrogated Nurul Islam and Awami League workers Mamun and Manik who had taken the victim to the RMCH.

He was buried at RU graveyard yesterday afternoon after namaj-e-janaza at Saheb Bazar and again at the university mosque.

Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and RU Vice Chancellor Faisal Islam Faruki visited the place of occurrence and the victim's house to sympathise with the bereaved family.

The city Jamaat at a meeting chaired by its Ameer Ataur Rahman demanded proper investigation into the killing and punishment of the killers.

Munshiganj

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spark to the hustings.

TIGHT SECURITY
A total of 2, 34,451 people, eligible to vote in Sirinagar and Sirazidkhan upazilas, are set to exercise their franchise from 8:00am to 4:00pm without a break amid tight security.

The authorities have deployed two companies of army men, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and police in force to ensure peace in the constituency where all the 89 polling centres have been marked as vulnerable by the district administration.

Under the security arrangement, a magistrate, 10 armed police with regular police and ansar battalions will be deployed at every polling centre.

The two companies of army men and seven platoons of the BDR have been assigned to patrolling duty and six mobile courts will function in the constituency during polling.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed and other Election Commission officials will not visit the polling unlike previous occasions.

The EC also scheduled for today the by-polls to Dhaka 10 constituency, which fell vacant when retired army major MA Mannan resigned from both parliament and BNP also to join the Bkhalpa Dhaka.

But legal tangles over election symbol dispute blocked the schedule.

PM calls

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inaugurating World Environment Day 2004 and Environment Fair at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city.

"We have to think about rational use of marine resources for our present and future generations," she added.

The prime minister also distributed prizes among the winners of painting and essay writing competitions on environment.

Ministers, MPs, representatives of international development agencies and environmentalists were present at the function, organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Presenting a gloomy picture of marine environment pollution with the progress of science and technology and increase in inter-continental trade, the prime minister said the very existence of man will be at risk if the present situation continues.

She said the beds of many seas, oceans and gulfs are now filled with refuse, resulting in an alarming reduction in marine resources.

Many marine animals have already faced extinction and the remaining ones are on the verge of extinction, Khaleda said.

The situation has been created for lake of proper practice and non-application of international conventions and protocols on marine environment protection and commercial ship operations, she observed.

Chaired by Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam, the function was also addressed by State Minister of the ministry Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, UNDP Resident Representative Yorgon Lissner, Acting Secretary of the Ministry for Environment and Forest Syed

Tanvir Hossain and Director General of the of Forest Department Khan M Ibrahim.

The prime minister said fish resources along the 710 kilometres of Bangladesh coast also decreased due to pollution from the wastes carried into the Bay of Bengal by the rivers Padma Meghna and Brahmaputra and for oil spills from marine vessels and oil tankers.

Heavy metals, hydrocarbon and other chemical wastes from ship breaking yards have further aggravated the problem, she said.

The prime minister directed the department concerned to be more conscious to ensure recycling of wastes, strictly following the international maritime guidelines to resist pollution, particularly from ship breaking yards.

Referring to different steps for preservation and improvement of environment, Khaleda said the government is always sincere to protect environmental balance.

She said the government is implementing different programmes to protect environment and bio-diversity in coastal areas.

The programmes include forestation in coastal belt, Sundarbans Bio-diversity Project and a special scheme to preserve natural ecology in 10-kilometre area around the Saint Martin's Island, Cox's Bazar-Teknaf coast line and Sundarbans reserve forest.

The possibility of building up echo-tourism in those areas should also be considered, she added.

Speaking at the function, Yorgon Lissner thanked the prime minister for the formation of a taskforce on environment. He suggested introduction of 'green tax' for promotion of environment.

Hasina

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BRTC in front of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on Friday night

In a statement, she said: "Amid foolproof security cover and presence of police near a sensitive spot like Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, setting fire with gunpowder might be a part of preplanned conspiracy of any terrorist group in which innocent bus passengers were made victims."

The Awami League chief condemned such "inhuman, cruel and heinous" act.

The former prime minister again alleged that the BNP-Jamaat coalition, after assuming power, unleashed 'mediaeval savagery' in which people are burnt alive by setting fire with gunpowder to the homes of AL leaders and workers and minority people.

"Earlier, when in opposition, they had bombed a passenger bus at Saydabad in the name of hartal and killed people and set fire to a tempo and killed a woman," she said.

Hasina also said that 11 people, including children, were burned to death in Bashkhali of Chittagong in an arson attack by terrorists.

She demanded immediate arrest of the criminals involved in such brutal incidents. "Recurrence of such heinous incidents can only be resisted if the masterminds are found out," she said.

The AL chief also demanded of the authorities to examine if the gunpowder used in the arson on Friday has similarity with those used in Bashkhali and Natore.

Hasina prayed for salvation of the departed souls and conveyed her deep sympathies to the bereaved families. She also urged the government to ensure proper treatment for the injured.

Hasina visited the people, who suffered burn injuries in Friday's arson attack on a double-decker BRTC bus, at Dhaka Medical College Hospital last night.

She visited Ward No. 33 and 32 and enquired about health condition of the injured.

Rumsfeld

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was speaking on behalf of the defence secretary, were speaking at an official joint press conference at Hotel Sonargaon yesterday evening that Rumsfeld was scheduled to attend but cancelled hours before the event.

Bangladesh and US authorities did not explain reasons for Rumsfeld's absence.

Earlier, Morshed received the US defence secretary on the tarmac of the VVIP terminal of Zia International Airport at 5:00pm.

Rumsfeld then held official talks with Morshed and called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to apprise her of the talks with the Bangladesh minister.

Morshed told reporters after the press briefing that he talked casually with Rumsfeld on Iraq. He said he told the defence secretary that Dhaka was closely watching the outcome of the draft resolution presented by the US and Britain to the UN Security Council on Iraq.

At the official press conference, Morshed said Bangladesh favoured full sovereignty of the interim government in Iraq and felt any economic, political or military decision on the southwest Asian country must be fully accepted by its people.

He said the United Nation's role was critical to ensure peace and stability in Iraq.

Fifty eludes Tapash

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of the over at second slip. The next delivery was edged past the vacant third slip area for four. Ball four was defended by Baisya who then whacked the fifth over the bowler's head for another boundary. But Collins had the last laugh when Baisya edged him again off the next ball and Smith made no mistake this time.

Collins finished with three for 64 but off-spinner Omari Banks was the most successful. The lanky Banks returned figures of four for 87 from 31 overs, the most number of overs bowled by a West Indies bowler in the innings.

The West Indies were 22 without loss at 10:30 pm (Bangladesh time). But it could have easily been a wicket down for the home team had Mushfiqur Rahman, standing at third slip, held on to a simple catch off first Test centurion Chris Gayle.

Brave Tiger Tapash, who frustrated the West Indies with 48 precious runs batting at number ten, was the unlucky bowler.

Admin caught

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additional secretaries at different ministries into retirement for having links with Islam is circulating in the secretariat.

Officials said a major administrative change involving officials in key positions with a focus on removing civil servants with links to Islam was on the cards.

Sources alleged an assistant private secretary (APS) to the prime minister who mobilised officials and BNP leaders for the removal of Islam was now working to identify pro-Islam officials.

Sources said the APS influenced promotion, posting and appointment of bureaucrats after the BNP took office.

A deputy press secretary to the premier, known previously as a strong supporter of Islam, changed his face after the forced retirement and was now promoting press coverage against him.

They said the changed face of the officials surprised many in the administration.

Police assault 2 AL Mps

FROM PAGE 1

mini-buses and buses remained off the roads throughout the day.

Most shops, businesses, educational institutions, banks and stock exchanges in Dhaka and Chittagong remained closed. Cargo handling at the ports declined sharply.

The shutdown initially called for 24 hours was aimed to protest the killing of AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master, failure to nab key suspects in the killing, emergence of religious extremist groups in north-western region and grenade attack on the British envoy to Bangladesh.

Besides the hartal, Sramik League enforced a 24-hour strike at mills and factories from 6:00 yesterday morning.

Left-leaning political parties and trade unions also supported the hartal and industrial strike.

In the capital, police rounded up some 50 AL activists, including 18 women, from Gulistan, Motijheel, Russell Square and Mirpur. Police action left over a dozen others injured.

The AL curtailed its hartal period by 12 hours, as its general secretary Abdul Jalil put it, "considering public interest." There was no request to the party to shorten the hartal period and that it had no links to the US defence secretary's visit to Dhaka, he said yesterday morning.

"The strike in industrial belts will continue till 6:00 tomorrow (Sunday)," he added.

Presence of opposition leaders and activists on the city streets yesterday was thin as on previous hartal days.

Around 7,000 law enforcers including paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles personnel were deployed across the capital to head off possible violence.

Police attacked a procession of women activists of the opposition led by former minister Motia Chowdhury in Gulistan area at about 9:00am. They also picked up in their van a woman activist, Motia then got into the police van and around 15 leaders and activists followed her, demanding immediate release of the arrestee.

The police van finally took them to Motijheel Police Station at about 11:30am and detained 12 of them, including former lawmakers

Sagufta Yasmin Emily and Shahin Monwara Haq.

Motia told newsmen in the evening she would not leave the police station until release of all the detainees.

At least six people were injured when police chased a gathering of opposition activists at Naya Bazar in the old part of Dhaka.

Dhaka City unit AL leaders were seen sitting in front of the Bangabandhu Avenue party central office all day long. Police put up barbed-wire fencing on both sides of the AL office early in the morning.

Police also dispersed pro-hartal processions at Motijheel and Mirpur.

Police arrested one Shakhawat Hossain Tripu when he along with two others tried to set fire to a taxicab on North-South Road in the afternoon.

A rickshawpuller, Rubel, suffered bomb injury in front of Mirpur Degree College in the afternoon.

Our Chittagong correspondent adds: The hartal passed off by and large peacefully.

City Mayor and AL leader ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury at a rally during the hartal period blamed 'ultra fundamentalist quarters' within the ruling coalition for growing incidents of violence in the country.

He alleged Jagrata Muslim Janata and its operation commander Bangla Bhai, Harkatul Jihad, Sahaba Soinik and other Islamic militant groups are operating under the shelter of powerful government leaders.

Our Khulna correspondent reports: An eight-year-old boy was severely injured when he picked up an abandoned bomb at Daulatpur railway station during the hartal.

Police seized some home-made bombs from the cement dealer's shop and arrested shop owner Aziz Ahmed, reportedly an activist of the city BNP.

Our Barisal correspondent says: Crackers were blasted yesterday morning and in the night before at 20 key points in the city.

Police and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal cadres chased hartal supporters and dispersed them.

Hunt continues

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Parishad (Islamic social service committee) used to run it under the guise of a farm -- Bahumukhi Unnoyan Prokalpa Khamar (multi-purpose development project farm).

The hilltop den had a tall observation tower to detect and bar unwanted access. The trainees used to do farm works in the day to deceive villagers and take martial training in the night. Villagers nicknamed them Talebani Hujurs.

According to locals, a man named Mohammad Sabuj was in command of the training centre, surrounded by three hills. There were 25 to 30 trainees at the time police raided it, but all of them excepting Tushar managed to flee, sources said.

Tushar, son of Lutfur Rahman of Britor village in Jhenidah district, said Sabuj brought him to the camp some four months ago. He was a student of Jhenidah Armukhi Dakhil Madrasa. After passing Dakhil examination, he came to a madrasa at Kaligonj, where he met Sabuj for the first time. Sabuj recruited him as a madrasa teacher for a monthly salary of Tk 1,500 and brought him to the camp, he claimed.

Responding to a query about the delay in starting the cases, he said, "We are gathering information necessary to file them."

So far 40 people were trained at the Hathazari camp, which has been in operation for the past two and a half months," Hasib told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon. "However, we are yet to get the list of trainees who have fanned out across the country."

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HUNT FOR HATHAZARI MEN

Explosives

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conditions of the lease, the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) authorities appoint the driver.

"We've contacted the BRTC authorities for particulars of the lessee, the bus helper and contractor," Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ramna Police Station Mahbubur Rahman said.

"We're now looking into previous incidents of fire on buses," he said adding police were checking whether any of the passengers was involved in the act.

Replying to a question, the OC said, "Whom will you arrest when people were dying and running for life? We've kept particulars of the injured to contact them later."

"We will soon make an announcement requesting passengers of the bus to come forward with information on the incident."

On object used in the fire, DC Khan Sayeed told The Daily Star, "It may be gunpowder, petrol or any other chemical. The upper deck first caught fire that rapidly spread across the entire bus fuelled by seat covers and other flammables. We'll soon know the details once the experts examine the bus."

On people responsible for the attack, he said, "Maybe they've managed to flee unhurt or have died or been injured. We are yet to get any witness who can detail the incident and help us find a lead to the attack."

Despite several raids in different parts of Chittagong district, police are yet to arrest the alleged brains behind the Ainpur camp in Hathazari -- Mir Anis, cousin of a state minister, and Ahmed Hossain alias Haderi Hujur -- and martial trainers Abdus Sattar and Mohammad Kashemi, sources said.

Enamul Haq and Mohammad Iskander, both held during Tuesday's unearthing of the criminal den, disclosed the names and addresses of the quartet, police said. Both masterminds of the training centre are local madrasa teachers, they added.

A police team headed by Hasib Aziz, additional superintendent of police, Chittagong, continued quizzing the arrestees who are now on remand at Hathazari Police Station, sources said.

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HUNT FOR HATHAZARI MEN

Explosives

Dr Shahidul Islam of Forensic Medicine Department carried out the post-mortem of the nine victims at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue yesterday noon.

He, however, could not say whether petrol or gunpowder was used in the arson fire citing they have no training or technology at DMCH for such detection.

Meanwhile, besides Meem, 2, and Yasmin, 27 who were identified on Friday night, five more victims were identified yesterday. They are Meem's uncle Rehanuddin Rana, 35, MA Jalil, 35, a technician of Sandhani Mirpur branch, Firoja Begum, 55, her son-in-law Delwar Hossain, 28, and their neighbour Forkan Mollah, 18.

No relative of the unidentified 11-year-old and 22-year-old girls, turned up to DMCH morgue where the bodies lie still unclaimed.

Six of the 15 injured are now undergoing treatment at ward No. 32 and 33 at the DMCH. Condition of Ohid and Meem's mother Monwara who sustained graver burns remained critical.

Azhar Ali, brother-in-law of Rehanuddin, a supervisor of Mahin Garments at Mirpur-14, received Rehanuddin and Meem's bodies yesterday afternoon. Yasmin's cousin Moniruzzaman took her body to their house in Narayanganj and Jalil's brother Salil took his body to their house at Mirpur-10.

GI, 5 Iraqis killed in attacks

AFP, Baghdad

A US soldier was among at least six people killed in persistent violence shaking Iraq.

Three people died in an ambush on the road to Baghdad airport on Saturday afternoon and a US soldier was killed and three others wounded in a bomb attack as bloodshed continued in the run-up to the June 30 handover deadline.

The US military said the three ambush victims, believed to be contractors, were shot dead by assailants who opened fire on their two-vehicle convoy from several directions with Kalashnikovs.

The bodies of the three victims were ripped apart and charred, said one US officer. Trails of blood trickled along the tree-lined central reservation, and body parts had been wrapped in a black bag.

The bomb attack that claimed the life of the US soldier took place near the restive Shia sum of Sadr City, a stronghold of fugitive radical leader Moqtada Sadr in eastern Baghdad.

It killed the number of US troops killed in action in Iraq to 602, the military said, and follows an attack in the same neighbourhood on Friday in which five soldiers died.

"According to initial reports, one soldier was killed and three wounded when their vehicle was flipped by an IED (improvised explosive device) blast at around 9:30 am (05:30 GMT)," a US spokesman said.

US troops retaliated by killing an unknown number of assailants in the vicinity of Sadr City, the US military said.

"US soldiers fired on a group of individuals armed with rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers as they ignited their vehicle near a police station in Sadr City around

Living tragedy

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Nine people were killed and at least 15 injured in one of the deadly arson attacks in recent times.

Habib boarded the state-owned double-decker bus from Gulistan with his mother Firoja Begum, 55, sisters Surma, 10, and Nadia, 12, brother-in-law Delwar Hossain, 28, and friend Forkan Mollah, 18.

"It was hell, simply hell and I was about to go insane not finding my mother, sisters, brother-in-law and friend. Finding my sisters crying in front of a bookshop