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SUNAMGANJ GAS FIELD BLOW-OUT

Fire tamed, but severe damage feared

SHARIER KHAN in Dhaka, IQBAL SIDDIQUI in Sylhet

The raging flames that had leapt 300 feet at Tengratila gas field in Sunamganj early Saturday subsided to 10 to 30 feet yesterday afternoon, indicating the fury of the inferno might be over much earlier than officials had predicted.

But geological experts said the gas field has probably been severely damaged 'internally'. A tremor had jolted Tengratila area at 5:00am on Saturday two hours before the fire broke out, they pointed out.

"The tremor indicates that faulty drilling by Niko Resources has done a lot of damage inside the 800-metre gas-well," an expert said. "It is likely that the uncontrollable pressure of gas in the well has forced a soil layer to fall. This did not happen even in the Magurchhara blow-out."

"This means a bigger gas reserve has been damaged in the internal landslide," he added.

Locals said the area was jolted several times yesterday but not as severely as on Saturday.

Eyewitnesses said the roaring flames at the gas field shot up to more than 1,000 feet yesterday morning. However, the flames came down to about 80 to 90 feet by noon and further down by the evening.

The base of the fire however has widened. Fresh gas leakages were noticed at a number of points

around the main well area.

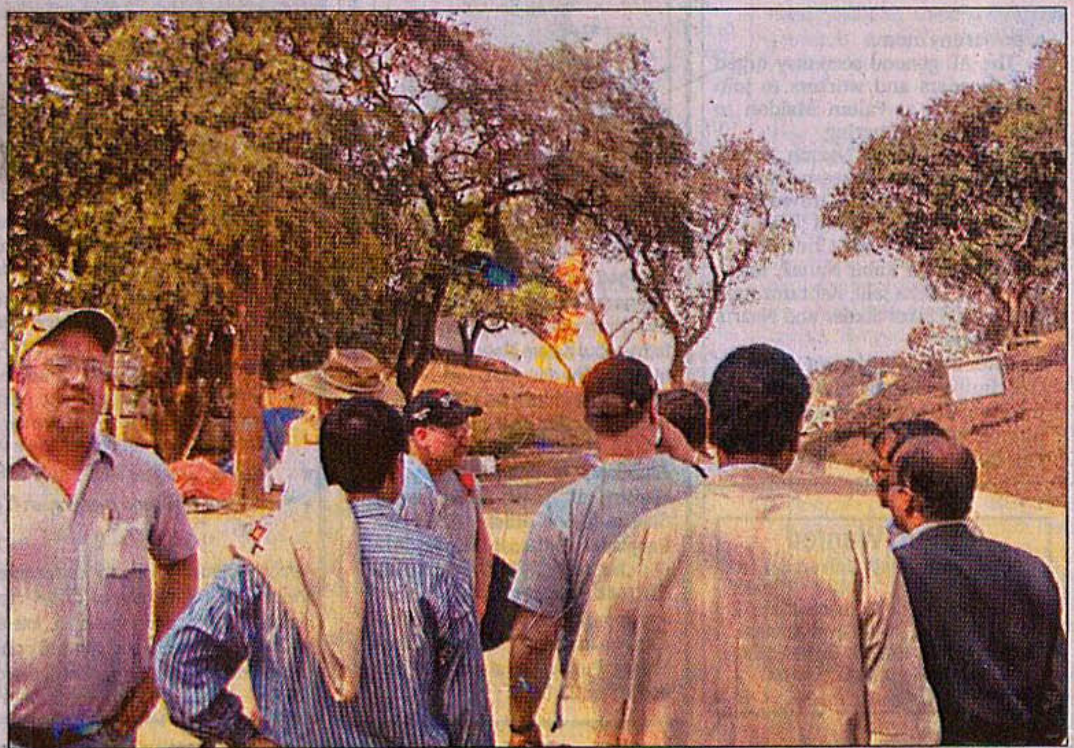
The district authorities have asked over microphone all residents within a three square-kilometre area around Tengratila to move to safer

places.

Niko started drilling in this abandoned gas field in December 2003 with a 1,700-metre target. But, it is alleged, the Canadian company did

not take proper safety measures and went on drilling up to 800 metres through the well that had only 300 metres of concrete casing.

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Experts of Canadian oil company Niko Resources visit Tengratila Gas Field in Sunamganj yesterday to examine the extent of damage from the blaze that broke out on Friday night.

Niko Resources unaccountable

SHARIER KHAN

The Canadian company Niko Resources, blamed for the huge gas explosion in Sunamganj on Friday, is unaccountable to Petrobangla, the country's oil and gas regulatory authority, according to industry sources.

This is because Niko has no Production Sharing Contract (PSC) with Petrobangla unlike other foreign oil and gas companies operating in Bangladesh.

Although companies sometimes have pointed out that Petrobangla's role as a regulator is inconsistent with its role as a business partner

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HC stays govt order on BGMEA administrator

Government asked to explain the move

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday stayed a government order for an administrator to replace the elected executive committee of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), apparently to end a stalemate among its rival factions.

The court also issued a rule

asking the government to explain within three weeks why the appointment of the administrator should not be declared illegal. The stay will remain valid until disposal of the rule.

A High Court Division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and AFM Abdur Rahman passed the orders upon a writ petition filed by 37 BGMEA members including its

President Annisul Huq.

"The truth has prevailed," said Huq in reaction to the verdict. BGMEA officials believe the court order will also make it possible to hold the BGMEA executive committee election slated for February 17 on schedule.

Prompted by a January 3 ruling of the Second Assistant Judge Court,

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4 more killed in 'crossfire'

8 firearms seized in 4 dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four alleged criminals were killed yesterday in 'crossfire' between the criminal gangs and the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Cobra and Cheetah in separate incidents in Dhaka, Chittagong, Narayanganj and Bagerhat.

During the anticrime operations, the law-enforcers allegedly seized eight firearms, 27 bullets including eight of AK47 rifle and six powerful bombs.

According to newspaper reports and human rights bodies, the death toll in the so-called crossfire and shootouts has risen to 163 since the introduction of the elite

anticrime force Rab in June last year.

DHAKA

Abu Bakar Siddique, 25, an accused in three cases including two for murders, was killed in 'an encounter' between criminals and a joint team of special police forces Cheetah and Cobra at about 2:20am yesterday, police said.

Tipped off, the team raided a criminals' den on Garden Road in Tejgaon. The criminals opened fire

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SAARC

5 nations agree to Feb 7-9 summit

India to respond soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five of the seven Saarc member states have endorsed Dhaka's proposal for holding the postponed 13th Saarc summit on February 7-9 with India likely to respond today or tomorrow, Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan said yesterday.

Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan have sent messages endorsing the proposed fresh dates

for the summit. Delhi's response is likely to come today or tomorrow since Saturday and Sunday are weekly holidays in India, Morshed told reporters at his office.

"Pakistan, as being the current Saarc chair, will inform us of the final dates for the summit," Morshed said.

Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman Masood Ahmed Khan told the

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O & A Level Special Supplement



ANNOUNCEMENT

A 4-colour, 24-page Special Supplement in tabloid size on 6th O & A Level Award Presentation Ceremony for the students who achieved outstanding results in the June 2003 June, 2004 sessions will be published on Wednesday, 12 January, 2005, along with the regular newspaper of the day. There will be no extra charge for this Special Supplement. Please make sure you get your copy from the hawkers.

ACC attaches Bac district officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday attached all district anti-corruption officers of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) on a temporary basis, despite a government order prohibiting the Bac staff from working for the commission until formulation of rules and regulations.

The decision came at an ACC meeting yesterday, a day after a 'problem-solving' meeting between the commission and the cabinet

secretary failed, further complicating the issues and giving rise to fresh disagreements between the commission and the government.

The ACC attached the district anti-corruption officers for preservation of records and documents and continuing the proceedings of Bac-filed cases, sources said.

"The records and documents might be lost or case proceedings might be hampered if there is no-one to look after them," ACC Commissioner Prof Maniruzzaman

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Hosts 7wkt away

AL MUSABBIR SADI, Ctg

Bangladesh will go into the fifth and final day of the first Test today needing seven more Zimbabwe wickets to celebrate a piece of history.

All eyes will be on the MA Aziz Stadium in the port city, as the home side, playing their 35th Test, attempt

for a maiden Test victory when Zimbabwe resumes their second innings on 46-3, still needing another 334 runs to avoid going 1-0 down in the two-match series.

Paceman Tapash Baisya gave Bangladesh's hopes a big boost when he captured two wickets in

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