

Gas still leaks

FROM PAGE 1 people already fleeing their houses for safety as the devastating fire broke out on Saturday morning.

Meanwhile, sufferings of people who had left their houses are mounting as they did not get any relief until yesterday. They could bring almost nothing with them and are now staying at different schools or relatives' houses.

"We are making a list of people within one kilometre area, who have to stay away from their houses for at least one month. Niko (the Canadian company exploring gas) will provide Tk 5,000 for each family," said the chairman of Laxmipur Union, where Tengratila is located.

Another list of the affected people as well as an estimate of other losses will be made through a detailed survey later.

Niko also agreed to pay compensation for the losses of plantation, he added.

Deputy Commissioner of Sunamganj Jafar Siddique told newsmen yesterday a list of the families living in the neighbourhood are being prepared by an 11-member committee comprising a Niko representative, local union parishad chairman, representatives of upazila administration and police officials. Niko will soon place the compensation money to the district authorities through

Tsunami-struck Bangladeshi lands in Indian prison

AFP, Fort Blair, India

India is holding prisoners from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the tsunami-hit Andamans who have already served their sentences because no one is claiming them, an island official said yesterday.

The prisoners, mainly fishermen caught in Indian territorial waters, have spent the 12 days since tsunamis hit the archipelago in a primitive camp with little water to drink.

Andaman's Judicial Secretary Anand Kumar Raha told the news agency the confined foreigners were being kept in 'safecustody'.

"It is a shelter for these men because they are foreigners and they may come in harm's way if they are allowed to roam free. It is safe custody in temporary shelter and we take a roll call everyday to ensure none are lost," he said.

The bare-backed men with matted hair squatted on the ground behind a barbed-wire fence looking desolately at a locked gate as soldiers with fixed bayonets guarded them under a blazing sun.

"They are kept inside a barbed wire enclosure? Really? I must check," Raha said, but admitted a group has filed a case in India's Supreme Court questioning the administration's right to hold people who have served their full sentence.

The prison-house lies secluded in lush hills outside Fort Blair and currently holds 227 Myanmar, one Sri Lankan and one Bangladeshi.

Five Indonesians who were pushed into Indian waters by the tsunamis were held in the facility for two days but released when their plight was highlighted by international media.

"They have finished their full term in the main prison but because they are foreigners they cannot leave unless their embassies take them away," prison guard Jagdish Srivastava said.

"But now that the countries of their origin are themselves grappling with post-tsunami work we don't know when these poor souls can leave," said Srivastava, swinging a stout baton.

Inmates of the controversial jail had their own questions.

US lauds

FROM PAGE 12 efforts. "Because its home ministry is still working with other agencies to develop a national anti-TIP action plan, Bangladesh has made little progress in implementing it," the State Department said in its latest assessment.

The report says Bangladesh "continues to make significant progress" in prosecuting trafficking cases. Since June, its prosecution efforts have produced 78 convictions for trafficking offenses, which stands in stark contrast to the 17 convictions obtained during 2003.

Similarly, the government has made "clear progress" in investigating the abuse and forced labour of children in the fishing industry in the vast archipelago of the Bay of Bengal, the State Department noted.

Since October, it cited, Bangladesh police and Coast Guards have rescued a total of 129 children from these islands.

Since June, the government has investigated eight officials allegedly complicit in trafficking—a marked increase from the absence of any such cases in 2003.

The Bangladesh government also continued to cooperate and work well with NGOs involved in anti-TIP efforts; it referred victims to various NGOs for care.

The State Department, however, said the government has yet to make evident progress in conducting broad anti-TIP public campaigns.

Petrobangla, he added.

The six-member inquiry committee formed by the environment ministry with its Additional Secretary Ehsanul Fatah heading will visit Tengratila gas field site on January 14, the DCS said.

People of the area who have left their houses are in a state of uncertainty over what to do now.

"We are staying at a relative's house about three kilometres from the gas field. This has created a problem for them. But we don't know what to do now," said Md Abdus Sattar.

"We have heard over BBC that we have to stay away from our houses for one month. But no government officials told us anything about this, and we are very much confused," he added.

Ramiza Akhter and 15 others of her family have taken shelter at Kanda Gao Primary School.

"I could only bring here some of my belongings. Union parishad members provided some rice and dal once but nothing more," she said as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I am a student of class ten but I could not bring my books here. Thugs later looted our house. I don't know how to manage the books again," said Emran Hossain, a student of Tengratila High School.

An official of Petrobangla brushed aside the idea of using the rig now lying in Chittagong for drilling a relief well at Tengratila. He said, "It will be a blunder to use such a giant rig for drilling a relief well here, and it will also be too difficult to carry it to a backward place like Tengratila. Moreover, site preparation will be a very expensive job."

He went on, "A smaller rig like the one used in drilling a relief well after the Magurghara blow out will be suitable for the purpose."

Contingents of police and BDR under the supervision of a Magistrate have been deployed near the gas field.

Shamsur Rahman murder case deferred on petition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Trial of journalist Shamsur Rahman murder case has been kept in abeyance following a petition filed by the complainant with Jessore district judge on Thursday.

In the petition, the complainant, Sonia Akhter Lucky, wife of slain Janakantha journalist Shamsur Rahman, expressed her concern, saying that she would be deprived of justice from trial of the murder case.

The case was under trial in the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge-1, Jessore.

5 more killed

FROM PAGE 1 a Rab press release.

After the team reached West Kalaikori area at around 3:15am, Moslem's accomplices fired on them, prompting the Rab men to retaliate, the release added.

Moslem 'tried to flee' during the shootout and was found lying injured having taken bullets. Doctors declared him dead when taken to Singra Health Complex, according to the Rab press release.

Rab said they retrieved a foreign-made pistol, a magazine, two bullets, a book, a notebook and BPCP documents.

Some sources, meanwhile, said Bangla Bhai's followers handed over Moslem to Rab after abducting him from Jirihat at Bagatipara upazila in Natore.

Student strike

FROM PAGE 1 The alliance, however, has exempted all the examinations under the national and public universities from the strike.

Meanwhile, all examinations to be held under the Dhaka University today have been postponed, a press release of the university said.

Hajj pilgrims

FROM PAGE 1 The morning, at about 2:00 pm and asked them to embark on the aircraft at 3:00 pm.

Most of the passengers are elderly Hajj pilgrims. They remained stuck in the situation without food and beverage till 6:00pm. They were not even served lunch.

Then when some of them started to agitate, in-flight attendants served only juice. "They treated us as if we were beggars," one passenger told The Daily Star.

Worse even, many could not use toilet due to severe scarcity of water at the airport.

"It's simply obnoxious that we who are travelling to Mecca for holy hajj could not offer our prayers due to water crisis at the airport," said another passenger.

When contacted, officials of SAA declined to comment on the situation.

"Everybody is busy taking care of the passengers and no-one is available to speak to the press," said an SAA staff at their desk at the ZIA.

"I don't know whether it would fly tonight or tomorrow," she added.

Many relatives of the passengers, meanwhile, called the newspaper offices to make complaint against the carrier for its maltreatment of the passengers.

The flight schedule on the SAA website shows the estimated arrival time of the flight at Jeddah at 20:45 (8:45 pm Bangladesh time).

Hearing on BGMEA administrator today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday stayed the January 3 orders of a lower court on appointment of an administrator to the BGMEA and a hearing on the matter will be held today.

Judge Mohammad Rafiqul Islam of the Court of District and Sessions Judge passed the stay orders following an appeal filed with the court on Monday by Anisul Haq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association.

Upon a petition filed by a BGMEA member, MA Masud, Second Assistant Judge Syed Azad Sobhani issued a rule on January 3 directing the commerce ministry to appoint an administrator to the BGMEA.

In line with the lower court orders, the commerce ministry on Thursday appointed an administrator to the country's largest trade body. However, a High Court bench on Sunday stayed the ministry orders on the appointment.

Meanwhile, the full bench of the Supreme Court (SC) will hear today a petition seeking vacation of the January 9 High Court orders that stayed the government order on the appointment of a bureaucrat as administrator to the BGMEA.

On hearing both sides, SC Chamber Judge Amirul Kabir Chowdhury referred the matter to the full bench for hearing.

The petition along with a leave to appeal petition against the High Court orders was filed by BGMEA member MA Masud who secured a lower court verdict for appointment of the administrator in its 2003 election dispute case.

Advocate Khandker Mahbubuddin Ahmed moving the petition insisted on the chamber judge vacating the High Court orders, said Dr M Zahir, counsel for the BGMEA.

Zahir opposed the petition and told court that the stay went against the government that had appointed the administrator. But the government, he argued, was not aggrieved by the stay and that it has not asked its attorney to oppose the High Court orders.

Jute, textile mill workers enforce strike in Khulna today

UNB, Khulna

Jute and Textile Mills Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad will enforce a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Khulna city today to protest the decision on closing down 13 state-run jute mills.

Workers of eight jute mills in the Khulna-Jessore region yesterday took out a procession in Khalipur industrial area in support of today's hartal.

The local administration has decided to deploy BDR (Bangladesh Rifles), police and Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) in sensitive areas to ward off disturbances.

A report from Sirajganj adds: Qawmi Jute Mills Protection Committee has called for a daylong hartal in the district today protesting the decision on closing down the mill.

He criticised the BSTI under the industry ministry for its weakness in monitoring the markets to check the adulterated goods which is causing serious health hazards for people.

The government spends about Tk 3 crore to run the organisation, but its activities are not satisfactory, observed the parliamentary body members.

The BSTI officials, however, held manpower crisis responsible for failure to discharge their duties properly. A total of 164 posts out of 474 have remained vacant for long, they said.

The institution is also facing problems as it has no office at district level other than the head office in Dhaka and three divisional offices in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna.

Organogram for new divisional offices in Barisal and Sylhet is yet to be finalised.

Industries Minister Matuur Rahman Nazami said his ministry has plans to open BSTI offices at greater districts to ensure proper market monitoring, meeting sources said.

The parliamentary body asked the BSTI officials to submit a report specifying the problems in discharging their functions at the next meeting.

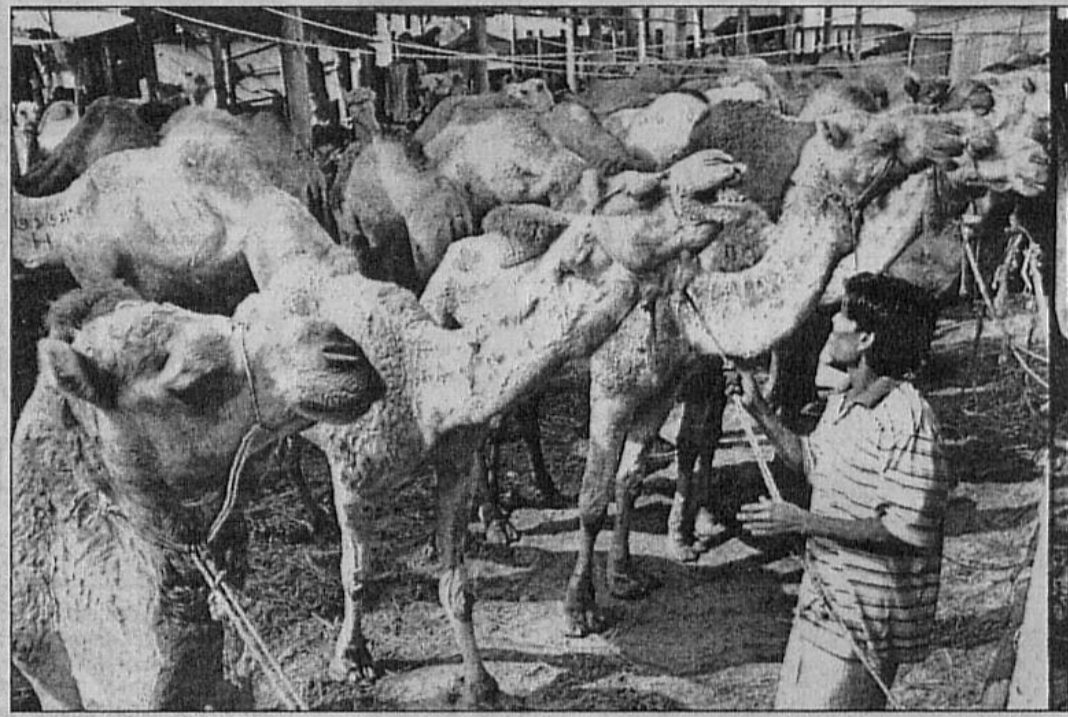
Penury leads

FROM PAGE 1 son to Habibur Rahman, using an affidavit filed with a local court.

Rahman, a father of two daughters, will raise the child as his adopted son, it was learned.

But it could not be learned from either day labourer Mohammad Ali or his wife Nasima if they were financially benefited for donating their child.

Habibur Rahman could not be contacted regarding any financial details in the incident.



Camels imported from India are being sold at the city's Gabtoli cattle market at Tk 30,000 to Tk 60,000 a head ahead of the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha. Camel has been a recent popular addition to the stock of sacrificial animals.

ACC meets ADB

FROM PAGE 1 development and details of the project will take decision after weighing every aspect."

The parties will sit soon for further discussion on the matter. The ADB will send documents of the project to the commission prior to its next meeting with the ACC.

"We've discussed how we could provide them with technical assistance," Hua Du, deputy country director of ADB's Resident Mission in Bangladesh, told reporters.

As part of the project, the ADB assisted the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) and expressed interest in doing so with the commission formed in November last year.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hussain, at a meeting with the commission on Saturday, suggested hiring ADB experts for formulation of rules and an organogram for the ACC.

All the three ACC members then opposed the view. They said they do not think the ACC needs any consultant right now because they can design the organogram themselves, meetings sources said.

Talking to reporters, Prof

Maniruzzaman Mian said: "I don't think hiring foreign consultants at this moment is necessary. It's my personal opinion."

"Experts in the country best know how things go on here. They know it better than foreign experts," Prof Miansaid.

MEETING ON MIAN'S LETTER The meeting to discuss Prof Mian's letter was not held yesterday for unknown reasons.

In the letter Mian resented a few steps and decisions of the commission taken without formal meeting and, in some cases, without consulting all the commission members.

On getting Mian's letter on Monday, the ACC chairman convened a meeting at 11:00am yesterday.

Talking about the letter, Justice Sultan told The Daily Star: "There is no conflict among the members. Everything is alright and we've full co-ordination."

Asked about the discussion on the letter, he said, "We are holding discussions every day."

Hasina to fly to US on Jan 17 for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina is likely to leave Dhaka for the US on January 17 for further treatment of the injury to her ear in the August 21 grenade attacks last year.

"She is still having some problem with her hearing and for this she would visit the US for three weeks," said a personal aide to Hasina.

Hasina, also president of the main opposition Awami League, would celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha with her son and daughter-in-law there. She is expected to return in the second week of February, the aide said.

The AL chief narrowly escaped the blasts on August 21 but blood clotted in her ear due to the explosions. Earlier, she had received treatment in Singapore and then in the US for the same problem.

Iraq insurgents kill

FROM PAGE 12 But Iraq's Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi has insisted the vote, Iraq's first national ballot since a US-led invasion toppled Saddam, will go ahead as scheduled on Jan. 30.

Seeking to shore up security for the election, Britain said it would send a further 400 troops to Iraq. Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon told parliament Britain would soon deploy a battalion of the Royal Highland Fusiliers for a limited period of time."

US troop numbers have already been raised to their highest level since the start of the war to help protect the polls.

On Monday, a powerful roadside bomb killed two US soldiers and wounded four when it destroyed a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, one of the army's most advanced pieces of armor.

15 forest staffs

FROM PAGE 12 PMO said two separate inquiries conducted by Bangladesh Army also found around 10 of its personnel, including a major, were involved in a recent timber smuggling incident in collusion with the forest staff.

The Army Court of Inquiry has already punished the army personnel, the source added, declining to give details.

An official of the environment ministry quoting the Armed Forces Division report said the 15 forest staff had persuaded the army personnel to cooperate in smuggling of timber. The forest staff and army men concerned shared the money made through smuggling.

India allows

FROM PAGE 12 fly abroad, a number of low-cost air carriers from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Nepal, UAE, Sri Lanka and Kuwait have shown interest in the burgeoning air traffic of India, said the sources.

The prospective flights of these international airlines would be short-haul in nature with a maximum duration of five hours, aviation sector sources said adding that the initiatives are likely to propel the growth of air service sector in India as well as other countries in the region.

Meanwhile, both Air Sahara and Jet Airways have begun to acquire wide-bodied aircraft to introduce their services to Asian countries, London and the US.

The two Indian carriers had embarked on the acquisition drive following the government's decision to allow private airlines to expand in the international sector beyond the Saar region.

Jet Airways and Air Sahara are already operating flights to Colombo and Kathmandu. Air Sahara is in talks to lease half a dozen Boeing 777 and Airbus A340 planes for its long-haul international services to places like London and New York.

Rising seas threaten islands, cities

REUTERS, Oslo

It sounds insignificant alongside the Indian Ocean tsunami, yet an almost imperceptible annual rise in the world's oceans may pose a huge threat to ports, coasts and islands by 2100.

Leaders of 37 small island states meet in Mauritius this week to discuss an early warning system to protect against tsunamis and a creeping rise in ocean levels, blamed widely on global warming.

Rising sea levels, now about 0.08 inch a year, could swamp low-lying countries like Tuvalu in the Pacific or the Maldives in the Indian Ocean if temperatures keep rising.

They could also lead to hugely expensive damage worldwide.

"It's often presented as a problem only for developing nations," said Mike MacCracken, chief scientist for climate change programs at the Climate Institute, a Washington think-tank.

"(But) developed countries will be very much at risk because so much infrastructure is at sea level."

Many of the world's biggest cities are near coasts -- including Calcutta, Dhaka, Lagos, London, New York, Shanghai and Tokyo. Flooding could cause billions of dollars of damage. In Bangladesh, 17 million people live less than three feet above sea level.

McCracken and some other experts say that recent evidence of a faster than expected melt of Greenland and Antarctic ice indicate that the rise in sea levels would be in the upper half of a 3.5-34.5 inch range projected by the U.N.'s climate panel by 2100.

Seas rose by 3.9-7.8 inches in the 20th century, according to the U.N. scientists. Thermal expansion -- water gets bigger as it warms -- would be the main cause of rising seas while melting glaciers and ice caps would add volume.

CO2 RISES The U.N. panel projects that overall temperatures will rise by 2.5-10.5 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100, mainly because of a build-up of carbon dioxide from cars, factories and power plants. Some scientists say U.N. models are scare-mongering.

Others say no reason to believe, as suggested by most global warming scenarios, that massive flooding will occur due to an increase in sea levels," Nils Axel-Moerner of the University of Stockholm wrote in a report.

He predicted oceans would gain 3.9 inches by 2100, avoiding the need for extra measures like those to protect Venice, where the city is sinking, or dykes like those to shield the Netherlands.

Others say the world can adapt --

India to highlight

FROM PAGE 1 transit fee, is pushing for a trade transit corridor with Nepal through India.

In the meeting attended by Myanmar and Bangladesh Energy ministers, Aiyar is expected to point out to Dhaka that apart from the transit fee, Bangladesh can use the Myanmar-India pipeline to channel its natural gas from fields in eastern parts to major consumption centres in the west, saving fresh investment.

New Delhi is encouraged by the favourable signals on the proposed project from Bangladesh and Myanmar where India's state-owned energy firms have been awarded an offshore block for extracting natural gas.

Aiyar may also suggest some other options including transportation of gas from Myanmar in Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) form, in case the pipeline proposal fails to make headway. The CNG processing is, however, costlier.

India's initiative for the cross-country pipeline project through Bangladesh is part of Aiyar's energy diplomacy and falls within the ambit of cooperation in energy sector listed as high priority area by BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).

But the SI told Aiyar to meet the OC to talk on the matter and also told him that the defendant was wealthy and that he resided in the USA, the complainant added.

Grenade carrier

FROM PAGE 12 the brains behind the racketeering," said an intelligence official yesterday.

Meanwhile, Saber Sharif, commanding officer of Rab-4, told The Daily Star yesterday that Rab members have gathered some significant leads from Hossain's village home in Jhenaitga upazila of Sirajpur. He however declined to disclose the information for the sake of investigation.

Rab's intelligence unit recovered the hand grenade from Hossain in the early hours of Monday. The bomb was said to be identical to those used in the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Dhaka last year.

Besides Hossain, Rab men arrested three others -- Abdur Rahim, Mohammad Mamun and a female in this connection the same night.

The arrestees are being held under Rab custody and quizzed by the joint team comprised of members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), National Security Intelligence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Special Branch (SB) and Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

fossil seashells have been found high in the Himalayas and continents are almost always rising or falling. Still, many countries favour caution.

The U.N.'s 128-nation Kyoto protocol, which seeks to curb emissions of carbon dioxide, will come into force on Feb. 16. The United States pulled out in 2001, saying it was too costly and that its targets to 2012 wrongly excluded poor countries.

"The cost of defending cities would be enormous but the value at stake is also enormous so protection makes sense," said Richard Klein, a senior researcher at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

"It makes less sense to defend agricultural land," he said.

Poor countries would be least able to build defenses, exacerbating the impact of rising seas, he added. "Vulnerability to rising seas has as much a social dimension as an environmental one," he said.

NEWRoad DESIGN? McCracken said countries needed to consider whether to build roads parallel to the coast on levees in low-lying areas or further back, with spurs toward the sea. And they needed to stop, for instance, building sewage farms at sea level.

He said a gradual rise in sea levels often caused erosion because, over time, it made coasts more vulnerable to hurricanes or cyclones.

"It doesn't happen gradually. People stay on the coast and then there is a big event like a storm or a tsunami. Then the coastline changes dramatically," he said. More than 145,000 people died in the Dec. 26 earthquake and ensuing huge waves which hit coasts from Indonesia to Somalia.

Scientific evidence from the past varies widely.

Yossi Mart, of Israel's University of Haifa, said that based on structures like Roman aqueducts and the sluice gates of a Herodian harbor, sea levels 2,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean were similar to those now.

"In the Crusader times, during the 12th-13th centuries, the principal jetty was built for a sea level which is lower than the present by more than 50cm (19.7 inches)," he said.

Conrad Neumann, professor of marine sciences at the University of North Carolina, said sea levels jumped inexplicably by 12 feet about 120,000 years ago, based on surveys in the Bahamas. They dropped again almost as rapidly.

"There was no man-made effect on the climate then," he said. "But we shouldn't mess with the climate; it can change in a hurry. If it's a sleeping dragon don't poke it with a stick; our stick might be carbon dioxide."

Demra OC

FROM PAGE 1 Amin of Eskaton Garden Apartment at Ramna of taking the sum from him.

Judge Mohammad Matuur Rahman took the case into cognizance and ordered authorities concerned to write for obtaining sanction against the accused to proceed with the case, as all are public servants but one Ruhul Amin. Atiur in the complaint said he had a semi-pucca building on 4.5 decimal land he owned at Kaziqanga Chandi Math in Demra area. On December 29 last year, SI Abdur Razzak with his personnel and 15 to 20 unknown goons went there at about 3:30pm and directed the tenants of the building to leave their houses. He threatened them that otherwise they would be implicated in arms case and remanded. Moreover, he also threatened that they would be 'cross-fired' by Rab (Rapid Action Battalion), according to the complaint.

After the incident, one of the tenants, Rabeya Begum, informed the complainant of the incident. Atiur then met the SI and asked him why he had gone to the building. The SI asked him to show the documents of the land, which Atiur did and told him that there was status quo on the land against the defendants.

But the SI told Atiur to meet the OC to talk on the matter and