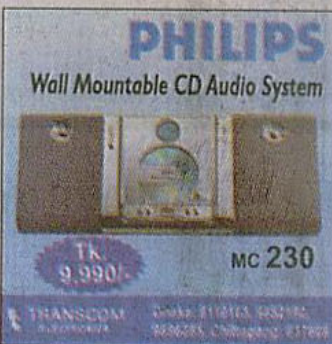




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Tengratila flames leap to 400 feet

Situation worsens as fire spreads further

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Situation at the Tengratila gas field in the remote area under Doarabazar of Sunamganj district has deteriorated further as the roaring fire went up to 400 feet yesterday.

Besides, the fire spread to at least 5 to 6 new points each with 20 to 30 feet height around the burning well.

Repeated jolts were experienced in three kilometre area around the gas field Sunday night and yesterday, locals said.

Leakage of gas in bubbles continued in the marshy lands two kilometres around the gas field.

Meanwhile, Niko has finalised the decision to employ the US driller Century for drilling the proposed relief well at Tengratila gas field, a Niko official said yesterday.

Century, which is working for the Unocal at Moulvibazar gas field, successfully drilled two wells and started drilling another in the same gas field on Sunday.

It will take at least 6 to 8 weeks for Century to get free for starting pre-

paratory work in Tengratila, the Niko official preferring anonymity said.

After the January 7 blowout and explosion destroyed the rig used by a Chinese company that was engaged by Niko at Tengratila gas field, Niko sub-contracted US company Parker for drilling the relief well there.

Parker's rig also got badly damaged in Friday's blowout.

It is not possible to start work there just now and they have to wait until the fire subsides considerably, a Niko official said.

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Niko unable to plug gas well before Dec

Experts fear, demand punishment to the 'incompetent' company

SHARIER KHAN

Gas experts yesterday observed that incompetent Canadian oil company Niko Resources is unlikely to be able to seal before December the Tengratila gas well that exploded for the second time on Friday.

The fire at the gas field is most likely to continue for a maximum of two months, damaging millions of dollars worth of national resources and the environment of Sunamganj area, one of them noted.

Niko is unlikely to be able to control the fire unless nature itself takes care of the problem, he pointed out.

"Niko is absolutely a novice and an incompetent company whose repeated negligence is costing the country its resources and environment. But a section of policymakers are protecting this company and punishing Bapex instead. Bapex has absolutely no role in the blowout. Niko is the operator and it should be punished first," he added.

The company officially says it will submit its plan of action within a week and upon its approval within two weeks, it will start its operation to tame the fire.

But the experts say they don't see any possibility of Niko quickly

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

376 industries keep polluting environment for 8 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No fewer than 376 industrial units continue to severely pollute the environment and have not implemented the environmental management action plan despite a government directive almost eight years ago.

Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam informed parliament yesterday that in 1997 the Directorate of Environment identified as many as 1,176 industries responsible for severe environmental pollution in the country. It had asked them to implement the plan and establish effluent treatment plant.

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KIBRIA KILLING

Top US lawmakers for free int'l probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of US senators and congressmen have asked the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to propose a resolution in the United Nations Security Council calling for an independent international investigation into the killing of Bangladesh's former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria.

"We recognize and appreciate that the Government of Bangladesh has arrested eight individuals and is seeking justice in the Kibria assassination case. We urge you to do all you can to see that the investigation is conducted in a fair, expedient and transparent manner and meets

international standards," four US senators and eight congressmen said in a letter addressed to Rice on June 23.

"It is important that this investigation restores public confidence in the justice system, and that is viewed as valid and legitimate by wide and diverse segments of Bangladeshi Society. A delegation of international observers could advance this goal," the letter says.

"If the investigation does not bring to justice the perpetrators of Mr. Kibria's murder, including those who organized and ordered the attack and any who may have worked to protect the perpetrators, then we urge you to propose a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Sitara's body arrives, burial tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A pall of gloom descended on relatives and admirers who gathered at the Zia International Airport early yesterday morning to receive the body of Dr Sitara Parvin, a professor of journalism at Dhaka University.

Prof Sitara, 52, was killed in a tragic road crash in the US on Friday, and her body was flown in to Dhaka by a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight at 3:40am.

Her father former president Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed along with other family members including Sitara's husband Ahaduzzaman Mohammad Ali and daughter Esha Srabontee received the body at the airport.

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AUG 21 GRENADE ATTACKS

George's confession leads to questions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inconsistencies and contradictions in George Mia's deposition 'disclosing the plans and action of August 21 grenade attacks' on an Awami League rally has caused widespread scepticism.

The 27-year-old man having criminal records since boyhood has confessed before a magistrate to his direct involvement in the grisly crime, which claimed 23 lives including that of AL's women affairs secretary Ivy Rahman.

During a three-hour recording of

his confessional statement under section 164, he told Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Jahangir Alam that he does not know the difference between grenades and bombs.

The poorly woven story of George lacks rationality and has raised doubt about its accuracy. Nowhere in the entire deposition could it be found that who in fact ordered the carnage and why. It also does not answer who brought the grenades and from where.

George, who was arrested at his home village in Senbagh of Noakhali

on June 10, said he and some others were hired to carry out the attack for only Tk 10,000 each. He took half the contract money in advance.

A senior police official requesting anonymity said, "I wonder how could a person agree to join the squad for such a meagre amount despite knowing well the consequences of such attack."

He also said, "If he were selected for such a high-profile operation, then why would he flee the area in fear, leaving the grenade in front of Gulistan Cinema Hall?"

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PHOTO: STAR

Bidisha, centre, estranged wife of former president HM Ershad, walks out of the BSMMUH prison cell along with her father and sister yesterday.

Bidisha set free at long last

Father tells of Ershad's threat after release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bidisha, the estranged wife of military ruler HM Ershad, was finally freed from jail custody yesterday evening, 23 days into her arrest.

Soon after her release, Ershad went to Uttara residence of Bidisha's sister Trisha, and threatened the security guards that if Bidisha is allowed to stay there, Trisha would be forced out of the house, alleged Bidisha's father Prof Abu Bakar Siddique.

"When we were taking Bidisha to Shikder Medical at Gulshan last evening, Ershad and his men in six motor vehicles went to Trisha's Uttara house and threatened the guards," Prof Siddique told The Daily Star last night over phone.

"I am anxious for my daughter as he [Ershad] seems to have become a bloodthirstyhound," he observed.

Despite repeated attempts, Ershad, plaintiff in two of the cases filed against Bidisha, could not be

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Prospect from Retrospect

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