

# Niko pushes Bapex

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consisting of representatives from Bapex and Niko for approval of its plans for Tengratila (officially known as Chhataak gas field) and Feni gas fields.

Tengratila field exploded twice in January and June due to Niko's gross negligence.

Niko has drafted a proposal to drill a well in Tengratila at a cost of \$3 million, spend \$1.7 million for site development and another \$6 million for installing a process plant.

In addition, it is seeking post-implementation approval of its illegal 19-km pipeline costing \$4 million. This pipeline was installed using Titas Gas Company's pipes, which were imported for the Dhaka Clean Fuel Project. Such gross irregularity was allowed by the then state minister (Mosharraf Hossain) for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

No action was taken against Niko despite a series of reports in The Daily Star exposing the scam.

There is no Gas Purchase Sales Agreement (GPSA) against this pipeline, constructed a month before the second Tengratila blowout, and when the inferno of the first blowout was still on. The pipeline was constructed in the domain of the Jalalabad Gas Field Company Ltd (JGFCL) without its approval and amid its protest.

The Lafarge already has an agreement with the JGTCL for purchase of 16 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas. The company is set to start production in February-March.

The JGFCL pipeline to Lafarge has a pressure of 1,000 Per Square Inch (PSI), as per the required technical specification.

"Technically speaking, the Niko pipeline is not even suitable for gas supplies from a gas field to any grid. This pipeline was meant for expanding Dhaka's clean fuel network using a pressure of 150 PSI. Therefore, Niko cannot even use this pipeline to supply Tengratila gas in future, if any," a Titas official pointed out.

In a study on Tengratila gas field, Niko claims that this field has only 110 billion cubic feet (bcf) gas. But a 1996-

97 study by Petrobangla had identified a resource base of 1.9 trillion cubic feet (tcf) there, of which 1.1 tcf can be commercially produced.

Niko also seeks approval for drilling Feni 3 and Feni 4 development wells at a cost of \$8 million.

The Feni field was supplying 40 mmcf of gas from November last year. But due to Niko's flawed plan to kick-start the field's operation last year, production rate has fallen to 27 mmcf now.

Niko now says drilling of these two wells will increase production and therefore the government can ensure better gas supplies to Chittagong region.

The JVA demands that Niko will conduct a 'work-over' in the abandoned well of the Feni field to begin gas production there. The work-over covers cleansing the abandoned well and identifying new gas zones. After the work-over, Niko is supposed to observe the gas field's performance for a year and then plan to drill new development wells.

But the company did not follow this process at all. It drilled two wells violating the JVA and from October last year it started supplying 40 mmcf of gas to Petrobangla without having any contract.

An official of the energy ministry said the Bapex is not interested in Niko's work programmes because it is trying to legalise its irregular activities. But the higher authorities have already asked Bapex to consider Niko's proposals.

Furthermore, the JVA dictates that as long as Niko keeps on making investment, Bapex will not get its free share of gas. Bapex holds 40 percent equity in the JVA.

The government meanwhile claimed 8.9 bcf gas and a bank guarantee of Tk 250 crore as Tengratila blowout compensation and for further drilling there.

Inspector general of police, Rab director general, commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and other high-ups of different law-enforcement agencies were also present at the meeting.

Govt announces

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For each suicide squad member, the government has announced a bounty of Tk 2 lakh and for each ehshar Tk 1 lakh.

The announcement came two months into the declaration of two big stakes on the heads of JMB chief Abdur Rahman and his aide Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, operations commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh.

The bounty of Tk 50 lakh on each of them declared on October 28 remains in force, the press release added.

"MILITANCY ISSUE TO BE SOLVED BY COALITION REGIME"

The state minister for home affairs yesterday said he expects solution to the militancy issue during the incumbent government's tenure.

Referring to achievements made by the law enforcers in combating militants, Babar said the Islamist militants will be defeated in time.

"I hope militancy will be routed within our tenure," he said after a meeting with leaders of the Christian community at his ministry.

He said this in the wake of the law enforcers' success in capturing some of the top JMB leaders including members the Majlish-e-Sura and a number of suicide bombers, busting their dens and recovering huge explosives.

SCBA team

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agency, "No government representative, even law minister Moudud Ahmed and his deputy Shahjahan Omar, did not visit the victims' family members and the injured people," he said.

He also said the SCBA is trying to collect fund to help the victims' family members and the injured. It gave away Tk 10,000 to each of the lawyers injured in the bomb attacks in Gazipur for their treatment cost.

Dhaka's textiles

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sector soon to devise strategy for the meetings in Geneva and Washington. "The product list was not finalised in the WTO Trade Agreement."

The meetings would decide the products of Bangladesh to go on the list of duty-free and quota-free market access and identify the products to bring out of the list.

Altaf said the review on the products would be completed next year and expected that the extent of duty-free market access for Bangladesh products would be expanded.

"It cannot be termed a futile exercise... at long last, we've achieved something which one cannot dismiss as futile exercise," said the commerce minister, who led the Bangladesh delegation to the sixth session of the ministerial conference.

A commerce ministry official, who was a kingpin for Bangladesh at the WTO meet, told the news agency that considering all aspects Bangladesh needs to diversify its export items to reap benefit out of the WTO offers.

The 97 percent tariff lines comprise some 11,300 products, from vegetable to high-tech computer and aircraft, from which the country could derive benefit, he said.

## Security upped

**FROM PAGE 1**  
his office adding that the arrangements will be stronger than the previous years.

As for security, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) forces will be deployed at the churches from December 22 and further additional forces on December 24. Law enforcers will make a sweep of the churches a day before the Christmas Day.

Special security will also be provided at the churches and the graveyards when the community offers midnight prayer on the night of December 31.

Law enforcers will set up a number of check posts at every congestion points in the capital so that illegal liquors cannot be carried, meeting sources said. All the bars in the capital would be ordered to keep their shutter down during the December 31 night to avert any untoward incident, they added.

The Christian Association delegation, led by its President Arnold Arun Gomez, asked the government for illuminating some 10 to 12 points in Dhaka on the eve of Christmas Day. They also asked for deployment of police-women at the churches for checking the women attending the services.

The association proposed inter-religion talks to discuss militancy. "The Ministry of Religious Affairs will take decision in this regard," said a government source.

"Bangladesh has a long tradition of religious harmony. We've seen no riot here since 1964. Those who are carrying out the bomb attacks aim at destabilising the situation and spoil this harmony," Christian Association General Secretary Albert D'Costa said at the meeting.

There are fundamentalist elements in all religion and if the government finds any among the Christians, it should arrest them, he added.

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# Bimstec region

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the meeting.

They would take decisions on the recommendations made by Bimstec senior officials Sunday on six core areas of cooperation—trade and investment, transport and communications, energy, tourism, technology and agriculture.

Expressing the hope that Bimstec-FTA would be operational from July 1 next year on conclusion of the Kathmandu negotiations on Dec 21-27, Khaleda said, "This will be vital in promoting our growing sectors, particularly those facing the challenges of globalisation."

She, however, said the FTA in goods should be attuned to meet the needs and constraints of the least developed member-states of the group.

The prime minister also called for giving priority to social issues as she said economic development can not be meaningful without social progress. Social issues, therefore, must remain at the top on the agenda.

"Our experience has shown that even at low level of income, it is possible to significantly improve standards of living, raise the overall human-development indices and bring people out of poverty," she said.

Khaleda also proposed to host a ministerial meeting in Dhaka on poverty alleviation early next year, with the hope that the meeting would be able to devise concrete actions to collectively address the problem in the Bimstec countries.

On the necessity of the public-private partnership, she said the private sector must be the driving force in trade and investment. "The prosperity of our region will depend largely on public-private creativity, their initiative and imaginative collaborations," she said, adding that governments will have the responsibility to create an enabling environment for the private sector to operate effectively.

Calling for easing visa regime within the Bimstec region, the prime minister said, "We must create an atmosphere for our investors and entrepreneurs to explore further areas of joint venture and cooperation."

Khaleda also called for implementing the measures identified by the cross-Bay grouping since its inception in 1997 and consolidating the gains so far achieved.

On the conclusion of the 13th Saarc summit held here last month, she said the Dhaka summit was a turning point for regional cooperation in South Asia. She said Saarc membership has been expanded with the decision to admit Afghanistan and to have China and Japan as observers.

"South Asia is reaching out to Southeast Asia and the Far East," she said, adding that five of the seven Bimstec members are also members of Saarc.

"It is vital that Bimstec forges ahead. I am confident that the out-

come of this ministerial meeting will reflect our shared perceptions and firm commitment for closer cooperation," she said.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Moshed Khan in his opening remarks said the ministerial meeting would dwell, among other things, on ADB proposal for financing Bimstec projects as well as formulating the Bimstec charter and secretariat.

An expert group will be working to make recommendations on the proposed charter and the secretariat for approval of the Bimstec foreign ministers.

The inaugural session was attended by Bhutanese Trade and Industry Minister Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Indian State Minister for External Affairs E Ahmed, Myanmar Foreign Minister U Nyan Win, Nepalese Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey, Thai Foreign Minister Dr Kanthai Supha-mongkhon and Sri Lankan Additional Secretary Karunatilaka Amunugama.

They later made a joint call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and expressed keen interest in forging cordial relationship between Bimstec and Saarc as complementary blocs.

The Indian state minister for foreign affairs proposed organising a joint Saarc-Bimstec Film festival to build up relationship among the member-countries of the two regional forums, which was taken as a good idea.

Khaleda Zia stressed further expansion of cooperation among Bimstec member-nations through enhancing trade and communication linkups.

The foreign ministers on behalf of their heads of state or government, particularly Sri Lankan and Indian sides, invited the prime minister to visit their respective countries.

Cabinet asks

**FROM PAGE 16**  
on controlling the sale of acid.

The Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Law provides for a Financial Crime Investigation and Prosecution Office (FCIPO) and allows the government to take foreign assistance to rout the crimes.

The law crafted by the Bangladesh Bank (BB) defines terrorist acts and prescribes harsh punishments including life imprisonment and death sentence for them.

The new law will replace the existing Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA) 2002.

Despite great prospect for industrialisation, the north-western zone lacks basic infrastructures like gas pipeline, big power stations, airports, and standard railway systems, she pointed out.

The area, mostly high land and free from flood, should be the main source of diversified agriculture products. The ADB has been financing the Northwest Crop Diversification Programme (NCDP) that started in 61 upazilas of the region in 2001 and is to be completed in 2006.

Some multinational companies including Tata and Asia Energy have already made commitment for investment of billions of dollars in the area.

The ADB is also preparing for various development projects in the area and will provide around one billion dollars for improving railway system there for facilitating big investment of multinational companies.

Development of infrastructure and employment through huge investments are required for overall poverty alleviation, Hua Du said, adding that micro-credit can only help the poor people to stay at the subsistence level.

OC sued

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The accused are OC Tariquul Islam, Sepoy Khorsheed and Havidar Delwar.

In his complaint, Kashem, also a refrigerator mechanic mentioned that he was going to Taltala to buy some spare parts at about 9:00am. When he reached the Khilgaon police box at Bishwaroad, some policemen posted at the box picked him up and took him to Khilgaon police station where they beat him mercilessly without any reason until he became senseless.

They also snatched away his Nokia mobile phone set, he alleged. Later the police forwarded Kashem to the CMM's court showing him arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the complainant added.

Jubo League president Zahangir Kabir Nanak and its General Secretary Mirza Azam have been made witnesses in the case.

Following a hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahi Baqui took the complaint into cognisance and directed the deputy commissioner of Detective Branch to submit an investigation report on the matter.

# No amnesty to militants

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Over 200 Ulemas assured the prime minister that the four-party alliance will be even stronger in the next general election. They also pledged all-out support for the government.

Number of leaders of Jatiyatlabadi Ulema Dal, a front organisation of the ruling BNP, Islami Oikya Jote, and pro-Jamaat organisations were among the participants.

Senior leader of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), a component of the ruling alliance, Emdadul Haque Arahizahi, said three out of nine discussants at the meeting demanded the government recognise the Kamwi madrasas.

"The prime minister assured us that the issue will be discussed in future," the IOJ leader told journalists after the meeting.

The dialogue, which began on December 12 amid rejection by the 14-party opposition alliance and pro-opposition professional bodies, resumed yesterday after a four-day recess.

Eminent citizens

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dialogue between the government and the opposition to work out ways and means to get rid of the terrorists.

"... The government has not been fully able to identify all the terrorists who are misinterpreting religion and take legal action against them," they observed.

Referring to the prime minister's pledge that she is ready to take action against the patrons of militants, they said people want to see that she takes proper action against lawmakers, ministers and others inside the government who are accused of harbouring the militants.

Expressing deep concern over the repeated bomb blasts and killing of innocent people, they said bomb attacks are being carried out since the attack on an Udichi function in Jessore in 1999 and such violence marked a sharp rise in the last two years.

"It is clear that some brutal religious bigots who lack good sense are the masterminds of the terrorist activities," the statement says.

Expressing strong condemnation and hatred for killing people in the name of religion, they said it seems that the terrorists are out to make the country a dysfunctional state by unleashing a reign of terror. The people are in a state of insecurity, they observed.

The statement says the state's most important duty is to ensure peace and rule of law and the government has to perform the duty on behalf of the state.

It is not possible to maintain social, economic and political stability and fulfil minimum hopes and aspirations of the people of a country where institutions responsible for ensuring peace and maintaining law and order fail to ensure security of the people.

"The people of this country established an independent, sovereign and secular state through supreme sacrifice. So some brutal extremists can never be allowed to continue their anti-people activities," says the statement.

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The FNB delegation at the meeting with the prime minister expressed concern about the situation prevailing in the country. They urged the government to stop the bombings for the sake of country's economy and people's life.

"We are very much worried as the bombers tend to target the NGO activists. And for that we have sought the government protection," Mueyed Chowdhury, also a former advisor to the caretaker government, said.

"We told her that the country's economy will be hampered if the bombing is not stopped," he added.

The FNB chief said they also suggested the government take some motivational programmes for the students and teachers of the madrasas.

He said the prime minister assured them that the government will implement the suggestions that it would deem important.

Talking to the reporters, member of FNB national executive board Rasheda K Chowdhury said, "The government has to curb the bombings with an iron hand."

She also said the prime minister rejected the possibility of granting the militants any sort of amnesty.

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"It is clear that some brutal religious bigots who lack good sense are the masterminds of the terrorist activities," the statement says.

Expressing strong condemnation and hatred for killing people in the name of religion, they said it seems that the terrorists are out to make the country a dysfunctional state by unleashing a reign of terror. The people are in a state of insecurity, they observed.

The statement says the state's most important duty is to ensure peace and rule of law and the government has to perform the duty on behalf of the state.

It is not possible to maintain social, economic and political stability and fulfil minimum hopes and aspirations of the people of a country where institutions responsible for ensuring peace and maintaining law and order fail to ensure security of the people.

"The people of this country established an independent, sovereign and secular state through supreme sacrifice. So some brutal extremists can never be allowed to continue their anti-people activities," says the statement.

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