

Niko pushes Bapex

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

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

Niko has drafted a proposal to drill a well in Tengatila 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 (ousted later) 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 (GSPA) against this pipeline, constructed a month before the second Tengatila 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 (JGFLC) without its approval and amid its protest.

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

The JGFLC pipeline to Lafarge has a pressure of 1,000 Pfer 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 Tengatila gas in future, if any," a Titas official pointed out.

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

Security upped

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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 incidents, 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.

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.

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 proposed 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.

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Bimstec region

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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.

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No amnesty to militants

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even take the madrasa chiefs along with them," Kazi Abu Horaira, general secretary of Jatiya Imam Samiti, told reporters after the dialogue with the premier.

He said the prime minister had told them that the law enforcers will not harass the students and teachers of madrasas.

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.

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

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

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

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.

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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," Muyeed 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.

NGO LEADERS EMBARRASSED
Leaders of the FNB felt embarrassed as the PMO officials described their meeting the premier as part of the national dialogue.

"We did not receive any invitation

letter from the prime minister. We met her on our own initiative as we are very much worried about the blast incidents," a member of the national FNB executive board told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

The NGO body at its executive board meeting on December 11 decided to submit a memorandum to the home minister and if possible meet the prime minister to voice their concern.

"By this time, a senior board member of the FBN talked to a senior PMO official and informed him of our decision. The PMO on Sunday informed us that the prime minister wants to meet us," the source said.

"The NGO body will also meet the Leader of the Opposition.

Earlier the government had claimed that a national dialogue had already begun with a meeting between the prime minister and a delegation of trade bodies on December 4. But the business leaders declined to consider the meet with the premier a part of the national dialogue.

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 Uddhi function in Jessor 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.

Referring to the prime minister's dialogue on militancy with the political parties and professional bodies, they said the prime minister would create a

Shibir man admits

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Meanwhile, Zillur Rahman Mahin arrested from Naogaon on Sunday confessed in a statement recorded before a metropolitan magistrate yesterday that he had been involved in the August 17 blasts. He said he directed by JMB commanders he planted a bomb at Rajshahi New Market.

He also named several other JMB leaders, but the law enforcers did not disclose their names for the sake of investigation.

JMB's Rajshahi zone commander Shaiful Haque alias Tarik, Tarik and Rezaul, who had been arrested with about 5000 detonators in their possession on Sunday were placed on a seven-day remand yesterday.

The police said Tarik was appointed as Rajshahi zone commander after JMB chief Abdur Rahman's son-in-law Abdul Awal had been arrested in Thakurgaon.

BARISAL
Family members of the five accused in a number of cases of August 17 bomb blasts in Barisal city demanded judicial inquiry into the cases and punishment for the real perpetrators claiming their relatives' innocence.

As the police have no intention to arrest the real perpetrators, they accused the same persons in 12 cases of bomb blasts at 18 places, which occurred at the same time in the city, they said. The police are harassing innocent poor people, they alleged. They sought intervention by the president and the prime minister and human rights activists of the country on humanitarian grounds.

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 Abdullahe Baqui took the complaint before the court yesterday. They were sent to jail.

MYMENSINGH
Eleven persons out of the 12 arrested in connection with the huge caches of bombs, explosives and bomb making materials that had

been recovered on Sunday, were remanded yesterday.

Only Humaira Khan, the landlady of one of the houses from where the caches were found, was released after primary interrogation.

Two separate cases were filed under Explosive Substances Act against nine persons while two were shown arrested under section 54. The court sent them to remands.

Asaduzzaman, one of the arrestees who is the JMB commander of the district, yesterday said he had taken training at Ghoradap under Jamalur Sadar upazila from Ataur Rahman Sunny in 2003. He also said bombs were made in two houses in Akua area of the town where Sunny used to visit often.

He also had telephone contacts with Bangla Bhai and Shaikh Abdur Rahman, he said. But he denied his involvement with the military activities of JMB as well as with August 17 blasts throughout the country.

Meantime, Rapid Action Battalion and the police have recovered a hand-grenade from a drain beside the boundary wall of the Girls' Cadet College at Sehara Para Road in the town yesterday afternoon.

"No trials have been complete during the alliance government. What can we expect from the BNP-Jamaat-led government when they are initiating amendment to the Press Council Act?" said BFUJ General Secretary Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul.

A draft of the amendment has already been prepared, he added while conducting the press conference.

"My father became the target of criminals as he identified the killers of journalist Manik Saha through his writing and wanted to bring them to justice," said Asif Kabir, son of slain journalist Humayun Kabir Bulbul.

Dainik Janmabhumi editor Humayun Kabir Bulbul was killed in a bomb attack in front of his Kholna office on June 27 last year.

Asif, who was also injured in the blast, said the probe into his father's murder is still incomplete and the masterminds are not yet identified even after one and a half years.

Babar Das, father of slain journalist Gautam Das said criminals killed his son as he wrote against illegal tender of a Faridpur road construction. Gautam, staff reporter of Dainik Samakal, was strangled in his office on November 17.

Aniruddha Chakraborty, son of slain journalist Dipankar Chakraborty, said they do not want a trial in the face of death threats by the killers.

Bimstec FMs

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meeting, and sign the FTA at the trade and economic ministers' meeting in Dhaka early next year.

Briefing