

Project plunges

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competent mining company to finish the task. Otherwise, the losses will continue to mount and the project will need heavy reinvestment.

The latest conflict started on November 6 last year when two out of four wires of a lift snapped. At that time, the lift was loading hard rock at a depth of 1,100 feet. The rock was being delivered to the lift using a scope-shuttle and a conveyor belt.

The MGMCL then suspended all mining work.

Soon afterwards, the MGMCL authorities found that the mine's high-powered water pump was also faulty and has become unusable.

In such a situation, Namnam repaired the water pump. But Petrobangla naturally asked Namnam to install a brand new pump, which the company declined. In several meetings later, Petrobangla asked Namnam to replace the faulty pump by importing a new one as such pumps are not available in the country. But the company's response has been negative.

The mine was financed under a grossly flawed supplier's credit scheme signed during the previous BNP government's tenure. The loan never came to Bangladesh and the project work began after Petrobangla made a down payment and started "paying back" the loan three years of signing of the contract, sources mentioned.

Petrobangla is now raising questions about the quality of all the installed machinery.

The present situation has also created uncertainty about the services of 322 mine workers, employed earlier in line with the previous deadlines.

The mining project originally outlined a total cost of Tk 650 crore. But Namnam only kept on killing time and depending on receiving Petrobangla's "repayment" of the loan that was never disbursed.

As the government was stuck with such a huge project, it had to

extend the time limit and increase the project cost. But all it received was repeated assurance from the company that the mining project would start production someday.

The "legal" extension of time limit for Namnam expired in June last year. As the project is still to be completed and there is no approved legal framework for a fresh extension of time limit, Namnam sought a Tk 9-crore two-year "expert service" to finish the work. Despite serious anomalies, Petrobangla once again gave it a September deadline for commercial operation and then a November deadline.

Meanwhile, the project authorities have completed surface infrastructures like railway track for transporting hard rock, office buildings, underground pump station, skip hoisting tower and truck weigh-bridge.

Namnam officials admitted that the company could not complete the task due to fund crunches and they are not sure when they can hand over the mine to Petrobangla. But they declined to say anything about poor quality equipment.

Despite repeated attempts, Namnam Project Director Kimm Hui Chun, and Managing Director Richunghi could not be contacted.

Managing Director of Madhyapara Granite Mining Project MA Rois Siddique said production from the mine totally depended on Namnam. "We are waiting for them to hand over the mine to us," he said. But he declined to say when that would happen.

Annoyed at Namnam's performance, MGMCL officials said they cannot at all rely on its commitment. The remaining 10 percent work of the project should take three to six months to complete but the company is so incompetent that it might never be able to complete the job.

Around 1.65 million tonnes of granite are likely to be extracted from the mine annually. The project will last 46 years.

Kansat agitation

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slogans against local lawmaker and for release of the arrested leaders.

Rural markets in Abbas Bazar and Trimohini areas remained closed for the fourth consecutive day. Several hundred trucks were stranded at Sonamasjidia land port.

"Fruits and onions worth several crores of taka are being perishable due to the barricade on the road," said Nazrul Islam, a clearing and forwarding (C&F) agent of the port.

The CID officer brushed aside the necessity of further investigation into the case.

After the attack that took place in Baidder Bazar in Habiganj, the CID was tasked with the probe of the murder case while Officer-in-Charge of Habiganj Sadar Police Station Shafuzzaman took up the task of the explosives case.

On March 14 last year, the high-powered government committee represented by senior officials of different law enforcement and intelligence agencies submitted the investigation report accusing 10 local leaders and workers of BNP and mentioned that the grenade might have been brought from the frontier of Sylhet.

Six days later the CID submitted charge sheet in the murder case naming the same 10 BNP men and mentioned that district BNP Vice-president AKM Abdul Quayum, who was later expelled from the party, is one of those who orchestrated the murder.

The other accused are Ayat Ali, Kajal Mia, Selim Ahmed, Tajul Islam, Shahid Ali, Jaiyal Abedin Jalal, Jamir Ali, Jaijal Abedin Mumun and Muhibur Rahman.

OC Shafuzzaman pressed charges against the same 10 people on April 20 in the other case filed under the Explosive Substance Act. In the charge sheet the investigator said Quayum collected the grenade from Chumirhatia area, without mentioning who supplied it.

The cellphone operators were, however, against such directive but the BRTC remained uncompromising.

The commission on January 19 asked the cellphone operators to collect personal details of the existing subscribers or snap connections in case of off-air.

The telecoms regulator also made mandatory a "certificate" issued by an elected public representative or first class government officer for each new subscription.

The cellphone companies earlier said it is almost impossible to gather personal details of the existing prepaid clients as the operators do not maintain any contact with them. The mandatory certificate for fresh subscription would also deal a severe blow to the growth of the mobile phone market in Bangladesh, they feared.

According to the documents, Quayum assumed that the potential local BNP candidates Abu Leis Mobin Chowdhury, GK Gaus and Ashraful Bari Noman would be blamed for the killing and that would clear his way to be a candidate of the ruling party.

Such similarities in the three probe reports have raised questions whether the two charge sheets just followed the government investigation report or whether the investigators of the two cases independently arrived at similar conclusions.

Mastermind remains

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investigation.

The High Court rejected the prayer and vacated the stay in November. The case docket has been sent to the court and it is now a matter of time to begin the trial," said Atiqur, a senior assistant superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

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Police so far arrested eight of the charge-sheeted accused while two others -- Kajal Mia and Muhibur Rahman -- are on the run.

Four of the accused -- Tajul, Shahid, Jamir and Mumun -- have already given confessional statements to a magistrate. They, however, prayed to higher court for retraction of their statements alleging that those were extracted by force in police custody.

Majid Khan, the complainant, said the state of the case is not "good". "We demanded further investigation into some points mentioned in the charge sheet, which has not been met. We went to the High Court with the demand and it asked us to make the prayer in the trial court which will hold the trial. But the trial is yet to begin."

Majid said he may go to the Supreme Court against the order on advice of his counsels.

He noted that the investigators have said Quayum made the attack but they did not mention who had given him the grenade. "If they could unearth information about the source of the grenade, it might have helped the investigation into the other grenade attacks that took place in the country in the last couple of years," Majid told The Daily Star.

According to the investigators, Quayum thought that the leaders who dominate the local BNP politics would have to face public wrath after the killing of Kibria, which would put him (Quayum) in an advantageous position. The party high command always decides who will contest an election from a constituency. Now the question is who assured Quayum of party nomination when he is just a petty leader?" said Majid Khan.

Butenis is also a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. She currently serves as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Islamabad.

Prior to this, she served as consul general to Bogot, Colombia and Warsaw, Poland. Earlier in her career, Butenis also served as chief of post liaison for visa services in the consular affairs bureau at the department of state. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and her master's degree from Columbia University.

Mentioning some lapses in the investigation, he said: "Why the investigators did not include the Awami League leaders and activists who were accompanying Kibria during the meeting on the day of his assassination as witnesses?"

About the investigation, Ruhul Quayum, son of accused Quayum, said his father has been made a scapegoat in the local BNP politics. Rejecting the investigation, Ruhul demanded neutral and international inquiries into the incident to find the real culprits.

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Rocca

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appointed to an important post at the state department soon. They said this fourth visit would be Rocca's last visit to Dhaka as assistant secretary for South Asian affairs.

Boucher is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of career minister. He most recently served as assistant secretary of state for public affairs at the department of state.

Prior to this, he served as the US senior official for the Asia-Pacific economic cooperation (APEC) forum. Boucher also served as US ambassador to Cyprus and consul general to Hong Kong.

He served as deputy principal officer in Shanghai, China earlier in his career. He received his bachelor's degree from Tufts University.

The assistant secretary is the head of the Bureau of South Asian Affairs which deals with US foreign policy and US relations with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

According to the US State Department, US foreign policy is firmly founded on the president's belief in expanding freedom -- for individuals as well as nations -- on promoting economic prosperity and on never giving up in the search for peace.

New ambassador to Bangladesh

The White House has also nominated Patricia A Butenis as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the United States to Bangladesh.

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When Quayum was produced before the court on April 16 last year, he expressed the desire to say something in the court. The investigation officer then told the court that Quayum confessed to everything he had done. Why his confessional statement was not recorded under section 164 of the CrPC then?" Majid asked.

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Pinto last appeared before the court in the case on October 4, 2000 and was absent from the court for 26 consecutive dates. On June 26, 2003 the court cancelled his bail and framed charges against him and two others. The court also declared him absconding and issued arrest warrant against him.

The home ministry in a letter on March 18, 2004 informed the district magistrate of Dhaka that it had decided to take back the charges against Pinto and the two others as they were "politically motivated". The ministry also asked the district magistrate to hand over the case to the district public prosecutor (DPP), who will arrange withdrawal of the case with permission of an appropriate court.

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Army personnel have constructed several pontoon bridges on the Turag to enable devotees to cross the river easily.

More than 100 medical camps have been set up at the Jatra ground to provide free treatment and medicine to the devotees.

SECURITY

The government has taken adequate measures to ensure security during the Jatra and deployment of contingents of police at the venue.

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Every individual was being checked with metal detectors and also manually at five points before they entered the Khittas (a block of the Jatra ground) at the venue.

Besides, 54 close-circuit televisions have been installed at different points and law enforcers are taking video footages of the devotees.

Bomb disposal units, mobile courts and fire service teams were seen stationed at different points nearby.

TRANSPORT

The authorities have arranged additional transport facilities for the devotees. To ease traffic congestion inside the city, devotees from Barisal, Chandpur, Kushtia and other regions, who previously used to board buses from Sadarghat for going to the Jatra ground, would be taken by trawlers this time.

Additional train services were also arranged on the occasion of the Jatra.

ROADS OFF-LIMITS

The Progati Sarani-Ashulia-Baynail Road will remain off-limits to all kinds of public vehicles for 24 hours from January 28 evening. The BRTC will provide 35 shuttle buses for commuters on the road for this time.

There will be 18 parking lots for vehicles and no vehicle will be allowed to park outside the parking spaces, the state minister for home affairs told the press.

Leaders of the lawyers' body said the lawyer community will be compelled in future to demand removal of the president.

They also said the CEC and the two new election commissioners must be removed for the sake of national interests.

The president, quick to act against Mohammad Ali, however, has not made any move on the Supreme Court Bar Association's (SCBA) resolution urging him to form an SIC to remove the CEC for "gross misconduct" in voter list preparation.

The SCBA forwarded a copy of the resolution to the president on January 9 and has also demanded removal of the two new election commissioners.

Meanwhile, SCBA president Amin Paribrahman said he will not take any steps to form an SIC against the CEC.

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