

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-shuffle 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, Nannam repaired the water pump. But Petrobangla naturally asked Nannam to install a brand new pump, which the company declined. In several meetings later, Petrobangla asked Nannam 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 Nannam 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 Nannam 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, Nannam 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.

Nannam 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, Nannam Project Director Kimm Hui Chun, and Managing Director Richungi could not be contacted.

Managing Director of Madhyapara Granite Mining Project MA Rois Siddique said production from the mine totally depended on Nannam. "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 Nannam'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 Sonamasajid land port.

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

Asked about the administration's inaction when widespread protests were going on in the troubled area, Additional Deputy Commissioner of the district Ferdous Alam claimed that the situation was under control of the administration.

Police and magistrates are controlling the areas and trying to restore road communication with the land port by repairing the culvert," he told The Daily Star last night.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday visited Kansat and condemned the police attack on common people. He demanded compensations for the affected families and assured that AL would bear education expenses of the students of the families.

He also demanded judicial probe into the incident and trial of the responsible persons.

Mobile phone

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The BTRC maintained unprecedented secrecy about the meeting as well as its outcome. The BTRC officials did not even want to disclose the time of the meeting.

According to sources, the telecoms regulator set a two-month deadline for the work and assured the cellphone operators of time-extension after considering their progress.

The cellphone operators were, however, against such directive but the BTRC 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 failure.

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.

Bush

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Bangladesh Ambassador to USA Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting, said President Bush in his letter stated that US would work together with Bangladesh in all areas, including politics, economy and trade.

On the outcome of the meeting with Rocca, he said the US assistant secretary expressed optimism to further strengthen the commitment of the two countries to work together on common agenda, including consolidating democracy and fighting terrorism and militancy.

Asked about US institutional support to combat terrorism, Shamsheer said if necessary all types of cooperation will be made and this will be discussed in future. "They will help us build capacity," he noted.

Rocca expressed satisfaction over the existing bilateral relations between Dhaka and Washington, recognising Bangladesh as a friendly country and a partner to fight terrorism.

The relations between the two countries will be strengthened in future, she observed.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and US Charge d'Affaires Judith Chammas were also present.

Judges' body

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The BJS is due to decide their next plan of actions in the extended meeting on February 12. Representatives from all judgeships of the country would join the meeting.

On January 17, the BJS gave an ultimatum to the government and vowed to go for tougher movements if the government does not meet all of their demands by January 29.

The declaration came at the end of their three-day token protest programme started on January 15, when all the judges of the lower courts across the country wore black badges during the court proceedings protesting government inaction to meet their 11-point demand.

BJS's demands include -- providing personal gunmen, tax-free vehicles and firearms for all the judges, guards at judges' residences and payment of Tk 50 lakh each in damages to the families of the slain judges in Jhalakathi bomb attack on November 14 last year.

The secretariat withdrew the personal secretary (PS) to Mohammad Ali two months ago and is yet to fill up the vacancy. So, the personal officer of Mohammad Ali is serving as his PS too, while his former PS is now serving as the PS to Mahfuzur Rahman.

A fax machine and a photocopier at Mohammad Ali's office went out of order some five months ago, but the EC Secretariat has made no move yet to repair those, sources said.

MOHAMMAD ALI ALSO FACES JUDICIAL PROBE
In a recent development, an initiative is on to form a Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to probe an allegation of 'gross misconduct' against Mohammad Ali filed by a Supreme Court lawyer.

President Iajuddin Ahmed has already received the prime minister's approval as required by the constitution.

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).

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

After the attack that took place in Balidar Bazar in Habiganj, the CID was tasked with the probe of the murder case while Officer-in-Charge of Habiganj Sadar Police Station Shafiuzzaman 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 area 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, Shahed Ali, Jainal Abedin, Jalal, Jamir Ali, Jainal Abedin Mumin and Muhiur Rahman.

OC Shafiuzzaman 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 Chunarughat area, without mentioning who supplied it.

Kibria's family, however, rejected the investigation saying the investigators were not allowed to work freely and they did not interrogate powerful individuals behind the killing.

All the three probe reports say that the motive behind the killing was election politics. Kibria was murdered to ensure that Quayum is elected from the constituency (Habiganj-2) in the upcoming election, although Quayum is not a potential candidate.

According to the documents, Quayum assumed that the potential local BNP candidates Abu Leis Mobin Chowdhury, GK Gaus and Ashraf 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.

Alis face alienation

FROM PAGE 1
Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria are counting down to the retirement day of Munsef and Mohammad Ali.

Once the tenure of Munsef and Mohammad Ali expires there will be no-one in the EC to oppose any move of the CEC-led faction, which already has established a full control over the EC Secretariat and is also preparing a fresh voter list.

In such a situation, the two factions in the sharply divided EC do not exchange any courtesy, even over telephone, with each other.

Soon after the retirement of MA Syed as the CEC, the government appointed Aziz to that office on May 23 last and the then secretary, who had been in conflict with Syed, built a close relation with the new CEC.

EXCOMMUNICATION SCENARIO
The two senior election commissioners, Munsef and Mohammad Ali, started facing non-cooperation from the EC Secretariat in August for opposing the move of CEC Aziz for preparing a fresh voter list.

The secretariat even barred the two commissioners from talking to the press. However, facing severe criticism, it withdrew the restriction after a few days.

The EC Secretariat has also stopped the monthly Tk 500 office entertainment allowance they received during the tenure of MA Syed and kept their medical bills unpaid for the last five to six months, sources said. On the other hand, the secretariat has kept on providing Tk 3,000 a month to the CEC for entertaining visitors. The then secretary also had drawn Tk 2,000 a month as office entertainment until he was appointed as election commissioner on January 16.

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Two killed
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head-on around 1:30pm, leaving one driver dead on the spot, witnesses said.

Both the buses were severely damaged in the accident. Tongi police said Azizur Rahman Bhuiyan, 40, driver of Binilimoy Paribahan, died on the spot.

Of the injured, 14 were committed to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) and 15 to Tongi hospital in critical condition.

Vehicular movement on the Dhaka-Ashulia Road remained suspended for over an hour after the accident.

GAIBOLI ACCIDENT
Transport workers went on the rampage at Gaboli bus terminal and staged demonstration as a bus ran over and killed a driver yesterday.

Witnesses said Ali Fossan Rakib, 32, driver of a bus of route No. 8, suffered serious head injury as a Metro service bus of Hanif Paribahan hit him at 10:45am. He was rushed to the DMCH where he died at 4:45pm.

As the news spread, drivers and workers of the route vandalised six buses of Hanif Paribahan, whose workers also damaged a route-8 bus.

Both the groups chased each other for one hour disrupting traffic on Dhaka-Paturia Highway and Mazur Road.

Police charged baton to bring the situation under control.

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

Four of the accused -- Tajul, Shahed, Jamir and Mumin -- 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 torture 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 other 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.

The mastermind could have been unmasked if the investigators could dig out this, he added.

"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.

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 out the real culprits.

The probe reports have been cooked up to save the real killers, he alleged.

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.

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.

Her nomination is now in the Committee of Foreign Relations for its consideration.

Govt petition

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The government had already withdrawn two other criminal cases filed against Pintu. One was for snatching bidding documents for an auction of the property of a bankrupt company at gunpoint and the other for injuring a number of Awami League (AL) men and police.

Pintu 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 Pintu 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 (PP), who will arrange withdrawal of the case with permission of an appropriate court.

PP Abdullah Mahmud Hassan on January 1 last year submitted a petition to the Fifth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka along with a photocopy of the home ministry's letter.

Meanwhile, Sammilita Ainjibi Parishad at a rally yesterday said the president will face controversy, as he has taken steps for forming a SJC against Election Commissioner Mohammad Ali but has not taken the SCBA resolution in cognisance.

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.

Two killed
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any clause that might go against the interest of the country, a civil aviation ministry source said.

Unofficial sources, however, claimed that the decision of the postponement came as the Thai Airways stepped back from the agreement following "warnings and unpleasant comments" made on Wednesday by Chittagong city mayor to the Thai ambassador.

Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury refused outright the cooperation sought by Thai Ambassador in Bangladesh Suphat Chitrakulch during a courtesy call at the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC).

According to a CCC press release, the mayor asked the Thai ambassador not to proceed with the Chittagong Airport management agreement.

The alleged behaviour prompted the ambassador to call State Minister for Civil Aviation Mirza Fakhrul Islam within several hours, expressing inability to proceed with the agreement, sources said.

The Thai Airways was quite hopeful about the agreement and ten officials of it had been staying in Chittagong for the last two months.

Biman Bangladesh officers, staffs and employees under the banner of Biman Steering Committee had been agitating to stop the move to hand over the management of the airport to Thai Airways.

Committee Convenor Nazmul Iman said the state minister for civil aviation assured the organisation's central leaders that the handover would not be held on the scheduled date.

Curb terror finance

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Rocca, who flew in Dhaka yesterday morning on a two-day official trip, handed over a letter from US President George W Bush to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, in which President Bush expressed the hope that the next general elections will be held on schedule with participation of all political parties.

The US assistant secretary held separate meetings with Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Foreign Affairs Adviser Reaz Rahman and Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin as part of what was described as "normal consultations on bilateral cooperation" between Dhaka and Washington.

She will meet Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence at 11:00am today.

ROCCA-BABAR

TALKS
In her meeting with State Minister Babar, Rocca said her government, which is providing assistance to train up Bangladesh law enforcers, offers further assistance to fight militancy in the country.

Emerging out of the meeting at Babar's office in the afternoon, Rocca

Biswa Ijtema

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various languages so that devotees can understand those.

A separate camp was set up at the southwestern corner of the Ijtema ground to provide accommodation to foreign devotees. Three tents (for English, Arabic and Urdu speaking countries) have been set up for around 3,500 foreigners, a volunteer said.

Cooked food would be supplied for the foreign devotees, expected to come from about 60 countries.

FACILITIES
Comprehensive arrangements have been made to ensure water and power supply, sanitation, medicare and other essential facilities for the devotees. Different government and semi-government bodies and other organisations are providing the services.

A 5.5-kilometre pipeline was set up to ensure regular supply of around 13 lakh gallons of water, Tongi Municipality Chairman Azmat Ullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, several water reservoirs have been installed and temporary latrines set up on the eastern and western sides of the venue.

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 around the Ijtema ground to provide free treatment and medicine to the devotees.

SECURITY
The government has taken adequate measures to ensure security during the Ijtema and deployed large contingents of police at the venue.

A five-layer checking system has been put in place at and around the venue. Twenty-two thousand personnel from the police, Rab, Bangladesh Rifles, Armed Police Battalion and Ansars are on duty there.

The law enforcers were patrolling the venue, nearby roads and waterway, and watch-towers have been set up to avert any kind of untoward incidents.

Every individual was being checked with metal detectors and also manually at five points before they entered the Khittas (a block of the Ijtema 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, Khulna and other regions, who previously used to board buses from Sadarghat for going to the Ijtema ground, would be taken by trawlers this time.

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

ROADS OFF-LIMITS
The Pragati Sarani-Ashulia-Baypail Road will remain off-limits to all kinds of public vehicles for 24 hours from January 28 evening. The BRTC will provide 315 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 had earlier told the press.

Hamas

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Fatah over the stalled peace process, corruption and by claiming its fighters forced Israel to pull out of the Gaza Strip last summer.

However its leaders issued contradictory statements about how it intended to deal, if at all, with Israel if it came to power.

Hamas's chief candidate Ismail Haniya said the movement would hold talks with Abbas, insisting it did not want to go to Israel.

"Hamas is not going to work alone, but with the other groups who represent the Palestinian people," he said.

Although the final results were not to be announced until Thursday evening, Qorei was one of a string of Fatah officials who conceded that the game was up.

"It is true that Hamas has obtained a majority and I have resigned to enable president Abbas to choose a new prime minister," said the Fatah veteran.

Abbas himself said in a statement that the results had to be respected as the election had been conducted freely and fairly.

"I urge all the parties to respect the law and accept the will of the people," he added.

Thousands of Hamas supporters took to the streets of Hamas's Gaza Strip stronghold to celebrate the victory.

did not answer any query of the journalists. But, Babar said, "They are concerned about militancy, especially the JMB."

"You should try to nab them [Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhail], Babar quoted Rocca as saying, adding, "They are ready to support us."

Talking to the media later, Babar also said President Bush in his letter acknowledged and appreciated the government's efforts to fight militancy. "They [US government] have shown happiness and satisfaction at the steps we have taken against terrorism."

About the modality of US assistance in fighting militancy, Babar said the US government is already sharing information with and providing training to Bangladesh Police. The training of the police concentrates mainly in dealing with money laundering and interrogation.

"They have given them training time and again and have proposed some more courses. The US also has offered to train our trainers," Babar said.

When Rocca inquired about the proposed Anti-Terror Financing Act, Babar told her the progress is satisfactory.

Asked, the state minister said they did not discuss counter-terrorism or any US proposal to give \$10 crore.

Rocca also expressed concern about the human rights condition in Bangladesh. "They did not mention anything specifically but said we should give attention to aspects of human rights," said Babar.

MEETINGS AT FOREIGN MINISTRY
"Bangladesh is not only a functioning democracy but also a role model for Muslim countries," Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin quoted Rocca as saying during her meetings with top foreign ministry officials.

Briefing reporters, Hemayetuddin said the US assistant secretary exchanged views on terrorism and highly appreciated the way some recent incidents staged by a 'group of extremists' were handled.

"Rocca was very appreciative of the government's anti-militant crackdown and hoped that this effort would continue," he said. The foreign secretary said Bangladesh has steady cooperation with the USA against terrorism and the government is determined