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Survey detects possible oil reservoir in Bay

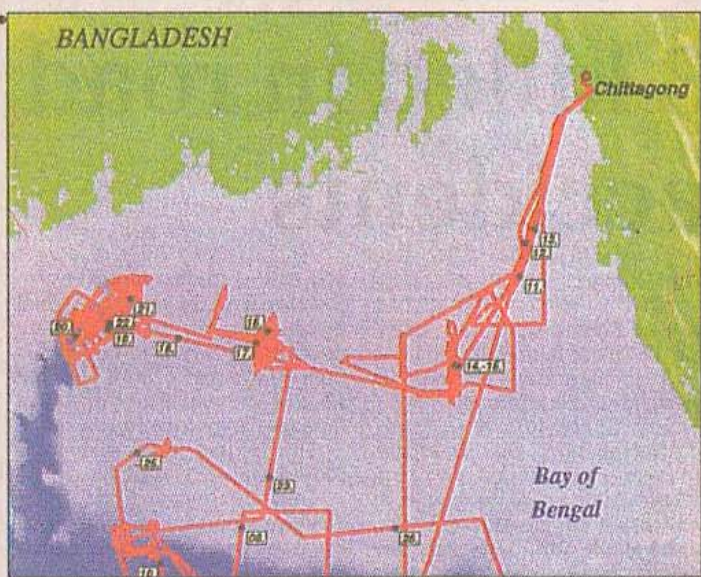
Advance studies needed to determine actual potential of first discovery of oolitic carbonate rocks

SHARIEF KHAN

A scientific survey group has found for the first time in the Bay of Bengal a thick sedimentation of elusive oolitic carbonate, which promises prime underground reservoir of oil.

The scientists extracted tiny, light-brown, rounded oolites from a depth of 125 meters off the Sundarbans coast, and found out through sonar map study that sediments accumulated in about 6-meter thick layers over a vast area between offshore blocks 21B and 20B, and beyond.

"But this study was not aimed at exploring mineral resources. Specific and advance studies will be able to determine the actual extent of oolite layers and the potential of oil and gas reserves," said a source close to the survey, conducted by German geo-scientific and natural resources



The red lines show most of the survey routes of the scientific study in the Bay of Bengal.

institution BGR and the Bremen University of Germany with partial funding from the US Ocean Drilling Programme.

Six Bangladeshi experts from the navy, Geological Survey of Bangladesh, Petrobangla and Chittagong Port Authorities also participated in the survey that was primarily aimed at studying the sedimentation in the Bay throughout June and July on the basis of a one-page agreement with the government, sources said.

Bangladesh could have obtained detailed geological data from this survey if the agreement was better or done in consultation with local experts. Still, the brief and sketchy sonic and seismic data that the Germans shared with Bangladesh suggest how invaluable this data could be.

The survey also produced seismic data covering more than

Aid for Lebanon off to Damascus

UNB, Dhaka

A special flight with first consignment of Bangladesh government's relief for the war-ravaged people of Lebanon left Dhaka for Damascus yesterday morning.

The chartered aircraft of Middle East Airways (MEA) left Zia International Airport at 8:30am with 20 tons of relief materials that includes blankets, biscuits, medicines and tea.

Another 30 tons of relief goods for the Lebanese people will be sent later, said an official handout.

The arrangement for sending the relief materials without any airfare by the MEA aircraft that brought Bangladesh expatriates from Lebanon earlier in the morning was made after a negotiation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In exchange, Bangladesh government exempted MEA from handling, landing and other related charges at the Zia International Airport.

The relief materials will first reach Damascus and then sent to Lebanon by road.

Secretary of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Ashfaq Hameed, Director General of Foreign Ministry Shahidul Islam, Director General of Disaster Management Bureau Mahfuzur Rahman and IOM Representative Shahidul Haq and other high officials were present at the airport.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

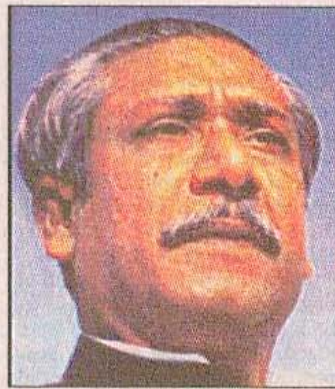
Hearing not held for single day in 5 years

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Hearing of the Bangabandhu murder case suspended five years ago was not held for a single day during the coalition rule for judges' reluctance to hear and the government's unwillingness to dispose of the long-drawn-out case.

The proceedings of the historic case, pending with the highest court for the last five years, is unlikely to resume before March next year unless the government appoints at least two judges to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (SC).

At least three judges are required to form a bench as only one among the seven sitting judges in the Appellate Division can hear the case. Of them, two have already heard the case, three felt embarrassed and one has become the chief election commissioner (CEC). Four benches of the HC had declined to hear the appeal. Even after intervention by the then chief justice Latifur Rahman, three judges



felt embarrassed to hear the case.

Eventually, the case had moved to the Appellate Division on clearing many a hurdle at the HC.

Jurists said the repeated instances of feeling embarrassed have led to confusion among the public about the judges' using such a means to sidestep a particular case, which in turn could end up in a denial of justice.

It all in fact has called into ques-

tion the integrity of the judges who one after another declined to hear the case even before its inclusion in the cause-list, they added.

Generally, no judge should feel embarrassed before a case is put in the cause-list. There is no precedent in the Supreme Court for a judge's feeling embarrassed to hear the case before its inclusion in the cause-list as happened in this particular case, observed a former judge of the SC.

Unfortunately, these judges did not assign the reasons for their embarrassment, although they should have done so for the sake of justice and transparency.

Latifur Rahman, former chief justice and ex-chief adviser to the caretaker government, in his book *Tattabadhaya Sarkar Dinguli O Amar Katha* [The days of the caretaker government and my account] said that when most of the senior judges felt embarrassed to hear Bangabandhu murder case, the (Supreme Judicial) Council was

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New jail code for ending hard labour of prisoners

Major amendment to introduce set of friendly provisions

SHAMIM ASHRAF

The government is going to repeal the provision of backbreaking work for prisoners as part of a massive amendment to the Jail Code about to be implemented soon.

The amendment will also introduce provisions of freeing inmates on parole, freedom of observing religious rituals inside jails, entertainment for prisoners, simplification of the division facility system, and removal of discrimination in allocation of foods for inmates.

The much talked about jail code reform plan worked out by a home secretary-led committee, which had begun in 2003, was completed on August 1. According to government officials, the amended code will be enacted this month after the cabinet approves it.

Following demands from different rights groups for modernising the Jail Code and removing inhu-

mane provisions from it, which had been introduced by the British government in 1864, the Government of Bangladesh formed Bangladesh Jails Reform Commission in 1978 with Justice FKMA Munim as its head.

Although the commission submitted its report in 1980 after studying jail codes of 14 countries and a committee was formed to implement its recommendations, the British-introduced jail code is still in effect with some minor changes to some of its 1388 codes.

The amended jail code will officially stop the provision of engaging prisoners in hard labour like road construction, stone crushing, removal of earth, masonry, and milling of grains and operating old-fashioned oil mills manually.

"Engaging prisoners in such work has not been carried out properly since the liberation and

now it is going to be officially banned," Inspector General of Prisons Brigadier General Zakir Hasan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prisoners, however, will have to fetch water, work in kitchens, produce handicrafts, line up for head counts, work as accountants in wards, as attendants in hospitals, and as sweepers and cleaners.

Although the British-introduced Jail Code allowed only male prisoners to produce handicrafts and sew, the amendment will also allow female prisoners to do those.

Removing discrimination in providing foods to inmates where some of them get 10 chhataks of rice each in total for two meals a day and some others get 12 chhataks will be changed, and all prisoners and detainees will from now on get 12 chhataks of rice for two meals a day.

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BDR-BSF FIREFIGHT Flag meeting today to settle dispute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A sector-commander-level flag meeting between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) will be held at BSF Harinagar camp at 11:30am today to have discussions on 256 acres of disputed farmlands, which triggered the 14-hour-long firefight between the two on August 9.

Deputy inspector general (DIG) of BSF Cachhar-Mizoram sector sent a letter to the sector commander of BDR last week requesting the meeting to be held, a BDR official said. He said BDR would raise a number of other issues for discussion in the meeting.

Sylhet BDR Sector Commander Colonel Abul Hossain told

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Law enforcers stop a car and search the body of an elderly man near Zia International Airport in Dhaka yesterday as security has been beefed up following aircraft bombing scare in the UK.

Briton gave breakthrough on bomb plot

Says Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

A British al-Qaeda suspect gave Pakistani agents critical details of an alleged plot to bomb US-bound jets, enabling Britain to smash the conspiracy, security officials said yesterday.

Britain's intelligence services asked Islamabad to trail Rashid Rauf for two weeks after he travelled to Pakistan and he was arrested on August 4 in the central city of Bahawalpur, two senior officials told AFP.

"When they interrogated Rauf he broke. He told them what we believe was not even in the knowledge of the US and the British -- that they were actually planning to blow up airliners," one of the

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Poll manifestoes must incorporate local causes

Regional dialogue in Faridpur told

RAFIQ HASAN and REZAUL KARIM from Faridpur

Speakers at a regional dialogue here yesterday demanded incorporation of local causes in the election manifestos of political parties.

They also demanded reforms in the Election Commission, resignation of the chief election commissioner, raising the number of reserved seats for women in parliament and direct



election to those seats.

The speakers also urged the people to raise their voice against black money holders and demanded nomination of honest

and competent candidates in the next general election.

They also demanded protection of Faridpur town from river erosion.

They said the concept of caretaker government emerged only due to lack of confidence of politicians in each other. The sooner the system goes, the better it is for democracy as well as for the country, they observed.

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Sonali classified loans soar on BPC default

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The classified loan of Sonali Bank increased by 83 per cent -- or around Tk 4,300 crore -- in the last six months as Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) failed to repay its huge loan from the bank.

The amount of loan default of Sonali Bank was Tk 5,105 crore in December last year, which was 23 per cent of the total loan, and the figure reached Tk 7,564 crore -- 33 per cent of the total loan -- in

March, sources in the bank said.

The amount increased further to Tk 9,364 crore, constituting 41 per cent of the total loan, in June.

"Apart from the provision short-fall, the huge loan default has reduced the bank's profits," a senior official of Sonali Bank said recently.

The bank is discussing the crisis with the BPC officials and has already asked them to reschedule the loans, he added.

The Sonali Bank appealed to the

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Cricket Update

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Tigers ease past Kenya

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh put their one-day series defeat in Zimbabwe behind them as they beat Kenya by six wickets in the first one-day international at the Nairobi Gymkhana ground yesterday racing to 170 with nearly 20 overs to spare.

Batsman Mohammad Ashraful

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