

Scrap deal

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Ahmad, president of the commission, said, "Any project on natural or mineral resources should be taken up after giving due attention to the country's economic and natural interests and the socio-economic interest of the locals."

"We do not want to see recurrence of any such 'dangerous games' as played before by Niko at Tengratilla gas field under the joint venture agreement where Niko caused colossal damage to our gas resource and the environment," he said.

The consequences will be irreparable if social and environmental damage is caused by the open pit method of coal extraction, he said. "Our position is very strong against all such decisions and contracts."

Dr Kholiqzaman, also president of BEA, expressed deep concern over the killings in Phulbari and demanded judicial probe into the killings, punishment to the persons responsible and compensation for the deceased and the injured.

Proper utilisation and highest value addition of mineral resources and assessment of its social impact are important for sustainable development of the country, the professor of Dhaka University (DU) said.

"It cannot be accepted that our gas or coal fields will continue to be exploited by the foreign companies only to serve the interest of vested quarters," he added.

"We are not against foreign investment, but it must be for the interest of the countrymen. We don't want any foreign investments where only foreign companies reap the benefits and the country suffers losses," he said.

The commission members also criticised the draft coal policy and said that it will go against the public interest since it has the provision for open pit mining — which usually requires relocation of people and affects the environment.

Acting editor of Saptahik 2000 Golam Murtaza said the coal policy is geared toward export and it cannot not be beneficial to the country in meeting the country's ever increasing demand for power.

The citizen's commission member secretary Dr Abul Barakat said, "Social impact of any venture is very important. Economic development will do nothing if social needs of the people are not addressed."

Asked on the relocation of people at the Phulbari project, Justice Golam Rabbani said the company should have made it clear where the locals would be relocated. Bangladesh cannot be compared with Australia or America where "you can relocate people wherever you want."

DU Professor Badrul Imam, Rafiqul Islam and former divisional chief of Planning Commission also spoke at the press conference.

C&F agents

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in delivering and dispatching of goods, several hundred people including the C&F agents have been staging demonstrations for the last two days demanding a solution to the situation.

According to the C&F agents, three out of four cranes used to handle containers have been out of order for the last few months that resulted in such a severe backlog of containers.

Usually, around 7,000 to 7,500 containers are delivered and dispatched per month from the ICD. As of yesterday, there was a backlog of 3,756 full and empty containers there, said Mobarak Hossain, deputy traffic manager of ICD.

"We have been suffering a huge loss as we are not getting delivery of our goods, some which are very urgent in nature," said a C&F agent seeking anonymity. They also have to pay charges to the ICD as long as their containers remain there while paying for container charges to the carrier for each day, he complained.

Echoing him, another C&F agent said he has incurred a loss of Tk 10 crore in the last few months due to the delays.

The C&F agents also alleged that their goods are found damaged most of the time as the containers are handled by outdated poor quality cranes that bump the containers into each other during operation.

The backlog of containers started almost a year ago, when the container handling job was awarded to GATCO Limited, a firm owned by the son of a former minister of the ruling BNP and some his friends, they alleged.

They never had such problems when another company provided the service for seven years, but the company was removed as part of a conspiracy, complained the agents.

However, a GATCO Limited employee requesting anonymity said they have six cranes to handle containers, two went out of order around two months back and another one has been inoperative for the last two days.

Two labourers had been killed and one maimed during the last six months while handling containers with outdated cranes, Sources said.

Man walks

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very close to the spot where the firing took place.

"I went to the Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital in search of my son's body but people there said they had sent all the three bodies to the Dinajpur Police Station," Azam said.

"I went to the police station only to hear that the bodies were handed over to their family members," Azam said.

Azam's may not be the only case of anguish and agony.

Meanwhile, the confusion over the actual number of dead in the Phulbari incident grew.

While the National Committee for Preservation of Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources and Electricity-Port claimed the death toll to be seven, the police remained firm on their stand of three dead.

Medical Officer Sarwar Ul Islam of Phulbari Health Complex said they had sent seven injured people to Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital for treatment along with two dead bodies. But he could not say if Afzar was among them.

The civil surgeon of Dinajpur told The Daily Star over cell phone that they had received seven injured on August 26 and one of them died that night. He, however, could not give the total number of dead people.

Meanwhile, chief of the Forensic Department of Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital Dr Yunus Ali said over telephone that they received three dead bodies on August 26 and all of them were from Phulbari. But he denied to have received any from the medical college.

Visiting Additional Superintendent of Police Ruhul Amin told The Daily Star that they had only three dead bodies on that day "as only three had died". Those bodies were of Tariqul Islam, 18, Amin, 14, and Salekin Raju, 14.

He said Tariqul was from Phulbari, Amin from neighbouring Barokona and Salekin from Nawabganj upazila.

US renews

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Friday, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said talk of introducing sanctions against Iran after its rejection of a demand by world powers to freeze uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities was as yet "premature".

"It is at least premature and unsound to speak of sanctions" as of now, Ivanov was quoted as saying by the ITAR-TASS news agency.

"In any case, Russia will continue to urge a political and diplomatic resolution (of the Iran nuclear problem), with the non-proliferation regime observed fully and harshly," Ivanov said.

The Security Council has given Iran an August 31 deadline to suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities, and an impasse looms with Iran insisting it has no intention of abandoning such work.

But Tehran has also made clear it remains keen to hold talks with all the key players over its nuclear ambitions, including even its foe the United States.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is to issue a report on that date after verifying whether Tehran has complied with the deadline.

Western countries suspect Iran is seeking to acquire a covert nuclear weapons capability under the guise of a civilian atomic programme which Tehran says is aimed only at generating electricity.

Magistrate

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at the magistrate and asking him to sign a paper they held before him," said Sheikh Sohrab Ali Hira, an employee of Phulbari municipality.

Farmer Nurul Islam, electronics showpwner Mamun and many others who claim to have witnessed the incident, echoed the same.

"The magistrate was not willing to give permission for the law enforcers to fire on the demonstrators," said Hira adding, "He was waiting to settle the matter amicably."

But the BDR men flanked him and said, "Either you die, or sign the paper." That's how they pressured him into signing the paper, Hira observed.

As the killings followed immediately, he regretted his decision.

None of the witnesses said that the police had opened fire on the crowd.

Describing the August 26 incident, they said the BDR men barricaded either side of the bridge over Chhoto Jamuna, a stream, when a huge procession was heading for Asia Energy office.

"The demonstrators were not even close to the Asia Energy office," said Shahadat Ali who took part in the procession. "We were barred at least one km off the office," he said.

The procession stood there for some time while officials of the local administration were busy trying to convince the committee leaders not to advance any further.

A huge number of policemen were also deployed there then.

"Some from the back of the procession threw stones at the police, instigating the clash," a law enforcer who was there at that time said in return for anonymity.

For nothing the BDR men shot tear shells at the crowd, inciting them to start stone throwing, said an agitator, Gutzar Hossain.

The firing took place when some of the protesters sought to take down the barricades, said Abu Zayed Aziz, a freelance filmmaker who was shooting the incident.

"Even when the firing began, some did not believe it to be real and tried to move forward," said Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Hasan Sarwar.

Things spiralled out of control rapidly and soon it was absolute

mayhem down the bridge and adjacent area, said the witnesses.

"They were shooting at almost everything between them and the bridge. Even those who were trying to help the bullet-hits weren't spared," said van-driver Joynal.

The BDR men shot Tariqul, a university student, who was standing under a tree as a mere onlooker, said Akbar adding, "I tried to drag him to a safer place, but they shot at me and forced me to leave him behind."

"They [BDR] continued shooting more than two hours, chased us down to Nimtola crossing and later to our homes," said Hira.

Following the incident, BDR men looted around 20 shops, alleged Lutfur Rahman, a shop owner in the locality.

Both Magistrate Abdul Aziz and the BDR officials declined to elaborate on the incident.

"We are now under a tremendous pressure from the government high-ups. We cannot disclose to you some things that took place on that day. Neither can we share those with the judicial probe committee," said a top official of local administration.

"Please don't press us for details. If we talk to you on this, we might end up losing our jobs," he added.

PM's Ctg visit

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to the congestion.

Besides, there were heavy traffic jams on the roads at Kadamtali, BRTC Bus Station, Kazir Dewa, Chawk Bazar, Jubilee Road, Pathantuli, Tiger Pass, Dewan Hat, Haji Para, Madarbari and Agrabad.

"We have been ordered by higher authorities to stop public movement on the Dewanhat Bridge for the security of the prime minister's programme," said Sohrab Hossain, Petrol Inspector of Bandar Police Station, who was on duty in Dewanhat area.

Meanwhile the movement of different inter-district buses including those for north and south regions, remained suspended for eight hours till 4:00pm following an official order by the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP).

Malaysian govt's

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It was a problem for the workers to seek police protection as they did not have their passports.

Violent behaviour of the management of these companies with the workers is only a small reflection of the highly exploitative form of labour management, the statement said.

It is unclear who will be responsible in cases of unpaid wages, dismissal or accidents at workplace, or who will be made accountable for violation of rights of the workers, it pointed out.

"The work permit issued will hold the name of the outsourcing firm. Thus, will the courts define the outsourcing firms as employers who in real terms are not the employers? But the employment act defines otherwise. The worker remains in a dilemma."

The statement said the companies that use the labour will therefore escape compliance with legal rights enshrined in labour laws, Employment Act, Industrial Relations Act and Trade Union Act. Even in cases of health hazards and accidents at work, the employers can run away from responsibility.

Tenaganita views these firms as arrogant and exploitative, who treat the workers like slaves and bonded labour, the statement added.

"The MFA said in its statement, 'More often than not, migrant workers are subjected to unjust and unfair employment contracts that force them to work long hours at near-poverty level wages in slave-like working conditions,'"

Hiring workers through offshore recruitment agencies abrogates the responsibilities of the employers and the Malaysian government, it said. "Such a policy gives the impression that Malaysia promotes slave labour."

The Malaysian government should sit with civil society groups in that country to formulate a better way of recruiting migrant workers and ensuring their core labour standards, the MFA stressed.

Innocent man

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He accused Shah Alam Babu in the charge sheet despite the absence of minimum evidence and witnesses against him in the investigation, it said.

The HC ordered bringing Sundar Babu to trial.

He is the main accused in the Llaqat murder case.

Gazi Llaqat Hossain, a leader of transport workers, was shot dead at his house at Sutrapur on March 14, 1998. Rezaul Karim investigated the case and submitted charge sheet.

The media had earlier reported that IO Rezaul Karim, now officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station, had put Shah Alam Babu in place of Sundar Babu in the murder case to take revenge against him for a dispute over money.

Even Llaqat's wife Rokeya Begum had testified in the lower court that Shah Alam Babu was not among the killers of her husband, nor was he accused in the case.

After a lengthy hearing, Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge Shamsul Alam Khan awarded death penalty to three persons, including Shah Alam Babu, and life imprisonment to five others.

Now Khan is District and Sessions Judge of Bagherhat.

Police arrested Shah Alam Babu one month before delivery of the lower court verdict and has been in jail since then.

The HC yesterday upheld the death sentence of Shahid Javed Goira in the case. The other who got death penalty — Ismail Molla — died in jail earlier.

The court also upheld life term of four convicts — Shajahan, Shahadat, Montu and Shamim and acquitted one, Yunus Molla.

Advocate SM Rezaul Karim moved for Shah Alam Babu in the HC while Advocate Md Abdur Razzak assisted him. Deputy Attorney General Fahima Nasrin and Assistant Attorney General Jamil Akter Elahi moved for the government.

Earlier, the HC had issued a rule regarding wrong conviction of Shah Alam Babu, and human rights organisations moved for the cause.

PM wants

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various roles and activities of the armed forces apart from their professional duties.

She said the members of the armed forces have been acclaimed everywhere in the world for successfully performing their duties in UN peacekeeping missions. She prayed for the six soldiers of Bangladesh Army who died in a road accident in Ivory Coast recently.

Presently, she said, the number of Bangladeshi peacekeepers has been increased to 16,000 from 10,000 the highest contribution to the UN peacekeeping mission.

Chiefs of the three services, area commanders and senior civil and military officials were present at the function.

RALLY AT BANSHKHALI
Addressing a public meeting at Banskhalai Ideal School ground in the afternoon, the prime minister categorically said the chief advisor to the next caretaker government will be appointed as per constitution to hold elections.

"Elections will be held in accordance with the constitution and the chief advisor will assume office as per constitution. It does not matter who accepts it or who doesn't," she told the rally.

Khaleda, also the chairperson of the ruling BNP, said her government had introduced the provision of nonparty caretaker government in the constitution, responding to the opposition's demand in 1996. As per

the provision, the immediate retired chief justice will become the chief advisor and he will constitute the caretaker government with 10 advisors.

The prime minister said the Election Commission (EC) is performing its function properly, but the opposition is not cooperating with it and obstructing its assigned function.

Turning down the opposition's demand for appointment of a new CEC in consultation with all parties, she said the Awami League (AL) had appointed its own man as CEC before the last election, but could not win. It is now clear that the EC cannot rig elections.

"We want free and fair elections, and an appropriate voter list is needed for holding fair polls," Khaleda told her audience.

The prime minister said the present democratic process will continue and none can stop it. If the opposition does not return to the correct path by shunning confrontation, they will further be isolated from the people, she cautioned.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated Tolia Bridge over the Shankha River, laid the foundation stones of Banskhalai Municipality building, new academy building of Banskhalai Alwal Degree College, academy building of Banskhalai Ideal High School and Banskhalai digital exchange.

Phulbari protesters

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Four express trains—Rupsha, Titumir, Barendra, and Simanta—could not operate on its regular route via Phulbari yesterday.

Ekata and Drujanto Expresses however continued service by going through Rangpur.

Besides, rail communications between Parbatipur and Birampur and road links between Birampur and Nababganj were still snapped.

'BDR UNWANTED'
The agitating locals yesterday declared that they will not cooperate with the BDR personnel in Phulbari in protest at the Saturday's firing that, according to unconfirmed reports, left seven dead and more than 300 injured.

The declaration came from a rally at Nimtola Crossing. Thousands of people took part in processions culminating into a huge rally yesterday morning.

"We are boycotting the BDR in the town and will not help them in any activities," said Manik Sarker, secretary of Phulbari Banik Samity (traders association). The rickshaw-van pullers association supported the declaration of non-cooperation with the paramilitary force.

At one stage, thousands of participants raised their hands and vowed not to return home until the government concedes their demands.

DEATH COUNT
The actual number of people died in police-BDR actions on August 26 could not be known even in three days after the incident.

The local administration kept putting the death toll at three while the Committee for Protection of Oil-Gas-Mineral Resources-Port Phulbari unit claimed the number to be seven.

"If they could give me definite names and addresses, and locations of the bodies they claimed to have been dumped, I will do everything necessary to recover those," Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Hossain Sarwar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Since the firing incident, the locals have maintained that the BDR men took away several bodies from the spot.

PRESS CONFERENCE
The Phulbari unit of the Committee yesterday said they will not sit with the local administration for negotiation.

"The government must send a high-powered body to Phulbari for talks with the locals and the Committee leaders," said Zonayed Saki, central coordinator of the five-left party and central member of the national committee for protection of natural resources and port.

Dawn-to-dusk hartal

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August 27, after a 14-party opposition combine meeting with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

At least five protesters were killed in police firing on August 26 when thousands of demonstrators were marching towards the office of the British coalmine company, asking it to stop its operations and leave Phulbari.

The AL and its allies have done all-out preparations to make today's hartal a success while the government has assigned 7,000 law enforcers to different city points to maintain law and order during the hartal hours.

In a rally held at Muktagong yesterday, the National Committee to protect Oil, Gas and Port Resources vowed to continue their movement until bringing the people to justice, who permitted the Asia Energy to extract coal in open pit method.

Demanding cancellation of the project, they said if the government wants to have talks with the protesters, it will have to sit in Phulbari. The committee also demanded removal of the Asia Energy from the country and cancellation of the coalmine deal.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon and General Secretary Bimol Biswas in a statement urged all to

make the hartal a success.

Bangladesh Awami Jubo League yesterday held a rally and brought out procession in Bangabandhu Avenue. Addressing the rally, the leaders said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government has been killing people since assuming power and they must resign immediately.

Other organisations, who held rallies and processions in favour of the hartal are Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Gonomukti Andolan, five leftist political parties, Bangladesh Udichi Shilpi Goshtee, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, Biplobi Nari Sanghota and Bangladesh Advivasi Odhikar Andolan.

FBCCI, BCI

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site," Nasir said.

The country's interest was not considered in the investment agreements with Kamaphuli Fertiliser Company (Kafco) and Lafarge Cement also, he added.

Replying to a question on a dialogue between the government and the main opposition Awami League, Nasir said the FBCCI is trying to facilitate the dialogue to pre-empt any political chaos.

AK Azad, president of Bangladesh Chambers of Industries (BCI), echoed the FBCCI president, saying all agreements signed with foreign companies in the country were anti-state.

He suggested involving business leaders, especially the FBCCI, in signing and negotiating any future agreement with foreign companies in the energy sector.

The FBCCI president identified contractionary monetary policy, repeated devaluation of taka against dollar, oil price surge in international market, syndicated marketing of essentials leading to price hike, and toll collection by even law enforcers as the other major hurdles to maintaining the existing growth in export and manufacturing sectors.

Fazlul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, apprehended a threat to the sector's robust growth due to the destabilised political situation.

He urged the government to solve the power crisis, help eliminate surcharge issue at Chittagong Port, allocate due cash incentives and reduce lending rate for fresh investment, and to sustain the growth.

Dhaka Reporters' Unity President Shaiful Karim and Secretary Sahed Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion.

Case against Abbas

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against another accused, Sumon, will continue.

According to the prosecution, on February 13, 2001, over 150 people led by the then Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mirza Abbas brought out a procession during a hartal called by BNP — the main opposition party at that time.

They attacked a procession of the then ruling party Awami League near Rajarbagh Police Lines.

BNP's armed activists fired shots from the procession at the Rajarbagh Police Line barracks that hit Constable Abu Naser, 27, on the third floor and he died on the spot. Constable Partha Roy was also seriously injured during the firing.

Subedar Jamal Uddin filed a murder case with the Motijheel Police Station the same day. The investigation officer pressed charges against Mirza Abbas and five others on July 11, 2001.

The home ministry in a letter on June 19 this year informed the district magistrate of Dhaka that it had decided to withdraw charges against Mirza Abbas, Khokon and three others because the charges were "politically motivated".

The ministry asked the district magistrate to hand over the matter to the metropolitan public prosecutor (PP), who would arrange withdrawal of the case with permission from an appropriate court.

Judges killing

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37 out of 44 witnesses of the case. Then the bench fixed Thursday to continue delivery of the verdict.

The JMB killed Sohel Ahmed, senior assistant judge of Nalchhiti upazila, and Jagannath Pandey, senior assistant judge of Jhalakathi sadar upazila, in a bomb attack on the judges' vehicle at Chandkathi in Jhalakathi on November 14 last year.

Besides Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, others to walk the gallows are JMB Majlis-e-Shura members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Khaled Saifulah, suicide bomber Iftekhar Hasan Al Mamun and Asadur Rahman Arif. All except Arif are in jail.

Hearing of the death reference case started on August 1 and completed on August 23.

Law enforcers

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on August 20 for field investigation.

During a hearing on the ruling yesterday, HRPB submitted its report about the arrest to the HC in the form of supplementary affidavit.

Submitting affidavit in opposition, Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali told the court that Kishore Kumar was arrested at midnight on July 23 in connection with recovery of four bombs, the FIR (first information report) was lodged the same day and he was sent to the court the following day.

While moving for HRPB, Barister Amir-Ul Islam told the court yesterday, "Although there is a provision in the CrPC for producing a citizen before a court within 24 hours of an arrest, police and Rab personnel are not following it in many cases." It is necessary for the courts to intervene in such illegal activities, he said.

After hearing submissions of both sides, the bench directed the law enforcers, specifically mentioning Rab, to follow the CrPC provisions in case of arrest of any citizen.

Advocates Manzil Murshid, Asaduzzaman Siddique and Barister Shamsul Hasan assisted Barister Amir-Ul-Islam.

According to the Janakantha report, garage worker Kishore, 32, had been arrested by Rab and taken away from his house at Jail Road in Jessore town at 9:00pm on July 19 and since then his whereabouts was not known to his nearest relations.

Rab did not even admit to arresting Kishore. When his brother Dilip went to Rab office at Police Lines in Jessore on July 20 and 21, Rab personnel told him that they had not arrested anyone named Kishore, the Janakantha reported.

Last date for voter list

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the information only from media reports," a top EC official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The EC had earlier declined to publish the draft voter list but later decided to keep the updated voter list on display for the public for three days from August 28.

But many field level election officials have failed to do so as they could not complete the task in time.

"We could not keep the updated voter list on display as the task was not completed," an election official in Khagrachhari district said when contacted yesterday.

Field level election officials of Narail district said they sent the updated list yesterday for display at the offices of local government bodies.

In some districts, election officials however