

Titas gas field

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experts of Petrobangla and outside it visited the site recently. They are expected to submit a report to Petrobangla by tomorrow.

"It demands immediate remedial action," the expert said. "In addition to threat of a disaster, we are losing an unspecified amount of gas every day."

Titas field produces 400 million cubic feet per day (mmfd) gas as against the country's total gas demand of 1,500 mmfd. Discovered in the early sixties by Shell oil, Titas was estimated to have a gas reserve of 5.12 trillion cubic feet (after four decades it now has 2.78 tcf).

Expressing deep concern at the gas leakage, a Petrobangla high official requesting anonymity said, "It might lead to a disaster like that in Magurjhara or Tengatala while the nation is highly dependent on Titas field for gas supplies."

Shaking the earth, the natural gas is streaming out with roaring sound from different spots of the Titas riverbed and local Loiska Beel (vast water body).

Local villagers told The Daily Star that gas was leaking from more than 3,000 big holes—including some 30-foot diameter holes—in IPRF paddy fields, beels and the Titas river. Gas emitted through some of the holes is in flames.

REMEDIAL ACTION
Several villages are already at high risk of explosion and unexpected fire. The risky areas are Sampur village, Runakandi, Sadullah Hati, Jamalpur, Khalapara, Dattkhala, Paranga, Gupinathpur and Baramura and Loiska Beel in Brahmanbaria sadar upazila.

All the 750 people of Sampur village are now facing the highest risk in the entire areas. It is situated on the east bank of the Titas river, opposite to Titas Location No-3.

During a spot visit, The Daily Star correspondent found that all the tube-wells of Sampur village have become dysfunctional. Some of the tube-wells are operating partly while the others are streaming out ground water mixed with natural gas and liquid hydrocarbon. The water is hot and visibly contaminated with hydrocarbon. Though undrinkable, the villagers are using this water for drinking and other purposes.

As all these tube-wells are emitting huge quantity of natural gas, polluted air of the village carries potential risk of a sudden fire any time. Sometimes when gas level in the air sharply increases, it starts burning all by itself whenever it contacts fire from oil-lamp or earthen oven.

On the night of February 2, Asma Begum, 22, received burn injuries when she unexpectedly caught fire while going to a house close to her's with a lamp in her hand. The fire started from gas spewing out of the tube-well at one Ali Mia's house and the flames rose to about 10 feet. As a result, trees were burnt.

The villagers rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze.

At another spot, one Rina Begum stopped going to her kitchen as natural gas was gushing out of her earthen oven. She now cooks food in another earthen oven in the yard.

Sayed Hossain of the same area covered his tube-well with a heap of soil a year ago because it started emitting gas. The heap of soil still remains as hot as a brick kiln. The villagers fear an explosion there anytime.

Boat ride on the Titas river has also become very risky. Some 10 days ago, when one person threw off a burning cigarette from his fishing boat in the middle of the river, a fire broke out as gas was bubbling out from that spot. Boat men and local villagers extinguished the blaze.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Jalal Sharafi, second secretary at the embassy in the Baghdad, was seized by a group related to Iraq's Defence Ministry "which works under the supervision of American forces," ISNA reported.

He was kidnapped outside a branch of Iran's Bank Melli in the Iraqi capital, he said.

Iranian diplomat kidnapped in Iraq

11 die in violence
REUTERS, AFP, Tehran

Iran's Foreign Ministry confirmed yesterday that an Iranian diplomat in Baghdad was kidnapped on Sunday and said it held US forces responsible for his safety. Iran's students news agency ISNA reported.

An Iraqi official had earlier said the diplomat was seized by gunmen who were wearing uniforms of the Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion, a special operations unit that often works with US military forces in Iraq.

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Based on reliable information

the group which has committed this completely terrorist act, are active under the supervision of the American forces and some of them have been arrested. There is a record of their previous acts," Hosseini said.

It was not immediately clear if those Hosseini said were arrested were seized in relation to the latest incident or other incidents.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran holds the American forces in Iraq responsible for the life and safety of the Iranian diplomat and condemns this action strongly and wants the quick release of the Iranian diplomat," Hosseini said.

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Mir Nasir

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detention order under the Special Powers Act.

Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmed appeared for petitioner Mir Mohammad Helaluddin Ahmed.

The same bench issued another

order on the rule on the government's

and that the accused do not have to worry over their fate for a prolonged period.

It is not the government's priority to arrest corrupt bureaucrats and businessmen at the moment as they can be tried under regular criminal procedures, Mainul said.

He said the arrestees will be tried as per the legal process. A special court and tribunal already exists in the Anti-Corruption Commission, but the government will try to quickly dispose of the cases so that the accused do not have to worry over their fate for a prolonged period.

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"After the clashes the gunmen

escaped, taking Sharafi with them."

Tehran charged that the abduction

was the work of gunmen linked to the Sunni-controlled Iraqi

defence ministry and also held the

United States responsible

Jalal Sharafi, the second secretary

at the embassy in Baghdad, was

abducted on Sunday by a group

linked to the defence ministry, which

operates under the supervision of

US forces in Iraq," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali

Hosseini said.

RMG staff

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were returning to the head office at Kalabagan after drawing cash from Uttara Bank's Satmasjid road branch.

After taking the bag of money, the

snatchers left the scene firing two

rounds of blank shots, he said.

Md Mokhter Hossain, proprietor of

MNS Garments, said he sent

accounts officer Nuhu Alam and

another staff Md Rajib to draw cash

to pay salaries to the employees.

A case has been filed with

Dhannod Police Station in this

connection.

Sharif Afzal Hossain, deputy

director of BIWTA, said they could

not demolish four establishments,

scheduled for demolition yesterday,

due to injunctions from a court.

Party registration

FROM PAGE 1
political parties is essential to ensure their accountability and transparency in respect of their source of fund. The EC will monitor the whole process of the registration, he said.

"The society will become free from corruption once the political parties get freed of corruption," the law adviser said.

The registered political parties will have to submit their annual audit report to the EC, which will be empowered to cancel registration of any political party if it violates the laws, sources said.

On preventing civil servants from taking part in general election within at least three to four years from their retirement, Mainul said a civil servant may join any political party after retiring from government service, but they should not take part in the election immediately after their retirement.

Since there is no such restriction, many bureaucrats develop a tendency to run the administration with political end in view, he said.

Replies to a query, Mainul said discussion with the political parties is necessary to formulate the law.

Former chief election commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz had moved for reforms in the electoral laws, including making the registration system mandatory, but he finally did not send the proposal to the government.

Newly appointed CEC ATM Shamsul Huda also hinted at massive reforms in the electoral system and told reporters on Monday that the EC would take the decision in consultation with the political parties.

The CEC yesterday started analysing the opinion and proposals that already came in the public domain regarding the reforms in the election system.

Sources meanwhile said a section of EC Secretariat officials provided the new CEC with lopsided reports on EC activities and its reforms published in the newspapers. They did not supply newspaper clippings of reports on the alleged irregularities and corruption in the EC Secretariat.

Leakage of gas from around a gas field area is not very unusual, said a Petrobangla official. Gas leakage is common in Sylhet region. But the situation in Titas indeed demands serious action.

"We need to examine the situation properly. It should not be very difficult. We can ask for help from Chevron. We have to appoint a consultant who could tell us if we can address this situation by drilling a relief well or logging the existing gas wells in the area," said an expert. "Until we have a consultant overseeing this job, we cannot say how much the whole remedial work will cost us."

Law adviser

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They should be taught a lesson that a time will come when the country will not protect them anymore.

"I am not saying everyone is guilty of corruption, but as a citizen of the country I am saying that politics is not for leading to corruption but to the service of the nation," he added.

Mainul said the government appreciates the people's anger at the politicians for indulging in corruption and that is why they are arrested.

He said the arrestees will be tried as per the legal process. A special court and tribunal already exists in the Anti-Corruption Commission, but the government will try to quickly dispose of the cases so that the accused do not have to worry over their fate for a prolonged period.

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