

LONG DELAY DOUBLES PROJECT COST

Granite extraction finally to start by next month

KONGKON KARMAKER, *Dinajpur*

Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Ltd, a Petrobangla subsidiary, is almost ready for commercial production as it has completed its first successful trial run.

The project is likely to be handed over to Petrobangla within the next three or four months.

Namnam, the North Korean company building the mine, was supposed to finish its work within late 1998. It had missed several deadlines for trial runs and schedules to make the mine operational, sources said.

According to Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Ltd (MGMCCL) officials, the mine is likely go on commercial production within March this year after the evaluation

of its trial run report, which is now underway.

The trial run started on October 10 and ended on December 6 last year but the handover to Petrobangla is being delayed due to bureaucratic complexities and long-term technical evaluation, said MGMCCL official sources.

Namnam developed five blocks in the mine and had successfully extracted at least 6,660 tons of granite from each block. Completing trial production from all five blocks separately, Namnam conducted a 24-hour trial run in all the five blocks together on December 6 last year.

The mine formed a technical and machinery evaluation committee to evaluate the actual technical and machinery status following the trial run. The committee is supposed to

submit its report before March.

At least 70,000 tons of granite, extracted during the three-month-long trial production, is on sale. The granite produced from the mine during the trial run is better in quality than the imported granite, MGMCCL sources said.

Managing Director of MGMCCL Abul Monsur Mohammad Azad urged the Roads and Highways Division, Bangladesh Railway and recognised building construction agencies as well as private and public companies to purchase the granite from them.

They have also fixed the price of different types of granite. The price of boulders is \$15 per ton, crushed

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Bird fair at JU opens

JU CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of bird lovers from across the country thronged Jahangirnagar University (JU) yesterday as the daylong bird fair, aimed at raising awareness about birds and the biodiversity of Bangladesh, was held on the campus.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman of the university inaugurated the "Bird Fair-2007" around 10:00am. The festival was organised by the Department of Zoology of the university in association with Bangladesh Bird Club, Nature Study and Conservation Club, and Wildlife Rescue Centre.

Students of different public and private universities, school-goers, teenagers and their parents were seen observing birds on the campus throughout the day.

Several telescopes and binoculars were set up at different spots on the campus to provide bird lovers the opportunity to identify and know about different species.

Students of 14 educational institutions including JU, Dhaka University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, participated in the Bird Watching Competition. The

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PHOTO: STAR

Migratory birds on the Jahangirnagar University campus thrill the viewers (inset). The photo was taken at the bird fair organised by the Zoology Department of the university yesterday.

Monsur lost his eyesight but never his vision

Tale of the first blind student to receive Master's degree from DU

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

April is his favourite, as significant events in his life took place during the month, said Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri, the first blind student to receive a master's degree from Dhaka University.

"On April 2, 1957, I started my education using braille which I consider as the start of the second phase of my life. On April 8, 1966 I appeared for secondary school certificate (SSC) as a private candidate despite obstacles and discouragement from the Dhaka education board authorities," said Monsur, who overcame his disability with determination, courage and optimism.

The day he started working for Assistance for Blind Children (ABC) it was April 2, 1978, the floating hospital, 'Jibon Tari' run by Impact Foundation Bangladesh, started its work on April 9, 1999, and April is the month of his late wife Jesmine Rahman's birth, added Monsur, who sets an example for around 1.4 crore physically and mentally challenged people in the country.

Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri, director and trustee of Impact Foundation Bangladesh, was also a technical adviser to Helen Keller International Bangladesh, general secretary of Assistance for Blind Children, and the executive officer of Bangladesh National



PHOTO: STAR

Visually impaired Monsur Ahmed fingers the Braille to work on a computer.

Society for the Blind.

He is currently also the secretary of Social Services and Management Trust of Sir John Wilson School, and the chairman of policy and legislation committee of the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled.

He lost his vision at the age of seven following a sports related injury which was treated wrongly while he was studying in class one in Bangla Bazar Kindergarten in Dhaka in 1956.

"A year was lost from my life due to the injury and its treatment. I could not play, used to just sit at home. Sometimes, I

used to go out for a walk holding my father Moziruddin Choudhuri's hands, who was a magistrate of a Dhaka court," said Monsur.

However, being from a privileged family he got educational opportunities despite being blind. He started to attend Rotary School for the Blind as its first student on the premises of a primary school in Razabazar, which is now Government School for the Blind situated in Mirpur.

After receiving his secondary school certificate with a first division he got admitted to Dhaka

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Yunus goes to Kolkata Sunday

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, *Kolkata*

Nobel laureate and founder of Grameen Bank Professor Muhammad Yunus will visit Kolkata February 11 to 13, his first trip here since winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

During the visit, Prof Yunus will be the state guest of the West Bengal government and felicitated by two city-based organisations. West Bengal Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi will host a dinner for Yunus.

The state's Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta said yesterday during Yunus' stay in the capital, there will be an exchange of views on the experiences of the Grameen Bank and those of self-help groups of West Bengal.

Dasgupta said due to Chief Minister Buddhadev

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Woman held at book fair for assaulting cop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested a woman at the entrance to the Ekushey book fair as she slapped a woman constable of the elite crime-busting force following a tangle about security checking.

Hasina Momtaz, wife of a magistrate based in Narsingdi, went to the book fair yesterday afternoon when a woman Rab member wanted to check Hasina's handbag at the entrance, witnesses said.

But Hasina, introducing herself as the wife of a magistrate, said she would not allow checking her bag.

As the Rab members remained

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Palestinian unity govt 'in a week'

Cheer for Hamas-Fatah power-sharing deal

AFP, AP, *Makkah/ Gaza City*

The Palestinian unity government agreed in Makkah will be formed "within a week," an adviser to president Mahmud Abbas told AFP yesterday.

"We will complete the composition of the government of national unity within a week," Nabil Amr said after Abbas's Fatah and the ruling Islamist Hamas signed the deal aimed at ending infighting and a crippling aid boycott late Thursday. Amr also said that there was "an agreement on integrating (Hamas's) Executive Force into the other security forces."

The Executive Force has been involved in much of the Palestinian infighting while other security forces are generally loyal to the previously dominant Fatah.

Gazans danced in the streets, honked car horns and set off fireworks to celebrate a Hamas-Fatah power-sharing deal they hope will avert civil war.

The joy was in stark contrast to the gloom that descended on the impoverished coastal strip during

months of deadly infighting between the political rivals. In a show of unity, some drivers flew both green Hamas flags and yellow Fatah banners from their cars.

"People are in disbelief," Maysra Balawi, 24, said late Thursday as he tried to steer his car through jammed streets. "Today is a feast. It is the first happy protest I have seen in Gaza."

Young men danced to the beat of drums, carrying each other on their shoulders. Celebratory gunfire could be heard in several parts of Gaza City and fireworks lit up the sky.

A coalition agreement between the Islamic militant group Hamas and the Fatah movement of President Mahmoud Abbas was signed late Thursday in the holy Muslim city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. Under the deal, Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas will remain prime minister. In all, Hamas will get nine Cabinet posts, compared to six for Fatah. Nine other posts will go to independents and smaller factions.

The Saudi-brokered deal caps months of on-again, off-again coalition talks, interspersed with fighting. The key disputes had been control over three ministries: Foreign, Finance and the Interior as well as the language in the new government's programme

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US think tank urges retreat from Iraq

AFP, *Baghdad*

An independent think tank warned yesterday that the situation in Iraq was beyond repair and urged that US forces should be pulled out whatever the result of the current "surge" of troops into Baghdad.

A report from Washington's Council on Foreign Relations concluded that a US military victory was impossible in Iraq, where "amateurish" post-invasion rule by American officials had seen Iraq collapse into civil war.

The respected institute's stark assessment comes at a time of collapsing public support for the war in the United States and mounting opposition to President George W Bush's strategy within Congress.

"The United States has already achieved all that it is likely to achieve in Iraq... Staying in Iraq can

only drive up the price of those gains in blood, treasure and strategic position," wrote Steven Simon, author of the report.

"The time has come to acknowledge that the United States must fundamentally recast its commitment to Iraq. It must do so without any illusions that there are unexplored or magic fixes, whether diplomatic or military," he warned.

"Some disasters are irretrievable," he continued, calling for troops to be pulled out by the end of 2008.

Simon, in a paper entitled "After the Surge: The Case for US Military Disengagement from Iraq," said troop levels are still too low to quell the fighting but more reinforcements would make little difference in any case.

The US invasion "plunged the country into a civil war that

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Violent clashes at Al-Aqsa mosque

AFP, *Jerusalem*

Clashes broke out yesterday near Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound between stone-throwing Muslim worshippers and Israeli police who entered the holy site, police and witnesses said.

The troubles erupted after Palestinian Muslim leaders called for "day of anger" Friday to protest against Israeli public works to repair

a nearby access ramp that Muslims and Arabs have charged endangers the holy site.

Police fired stun grenades as worshippers threw stones near the compound, which is also venerated by Jewish worshippers as the Temple Mount.

"Police have been compelled to enter the Mughrabi Gate and enter

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Cellphone trade on in CHT despite ban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khagrachhari*

Mobile phone business in three hill districts--Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban--continues despite a ban imposed by the caretaker government.

On February 4, the government imposed a ban on mobile phone business in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the interest of national security. But the owners of the call centres are still doing the business, using antenna.

This correspondent visited the eight upazilas of Khagrachhari district and found several hundred mobile phone businessmen continuing their business, using antenna.

Liton, owner of Alap Telephone centre in Khagrachhari Market said, "We use mobile phone secretly. The administration is ignorant about it."

Farid Mazumder, another mobile phone businessman at Khagrachhari under Khagrachhari

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PHOTO: STAR

Book lovers wait in long queues for tickets to enter the Ekushey Book Fair on the Bangla Academy premises as a large number of people thronged the fair on weekly holiday yesterday.

Find out 'illegal' wealth amassed by Jamaat leaders : WP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers Party of Bangladesh yesterday urged the caretaker government to find out the 'illegal' wealth owned by Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and bring them under justice.

At a party politburo meeting, the Workers Party leaders said there is no need to make delay to hold the next general election.

As no step has yet been taken to find out the 'corrupt' Jamaat leaders and the sources of their illegal wealth, it would create suspicion in the mind of people, they said.

They supported the joint forces' crackdown on the corrupt political leaders but said the very aim of the present crackdown would fail if it is used to create hatred against politics and the politicians.

Workers Party General Secretary Bimol Biswas, Politburo Member Haider Akbar Khan Rono, and Nurul Hasan, among others, were present in the meeting.