

Tri-nation gas pipeline

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Indian territory.

However, there had not been any fruitful negotiations between India and Bangladesh on the tri-nation pipeline. Consequently, Myanmar signed agreement with China to sell its gas.

Recently, the issue of tri-nation gas pipeline again came up as a reference at the Delhi meeting on regional cooperation in energy sector.

India has also planned energy import from central Asia, passing through a long pipeline that proves expensive.

LEASE OF MYANMAR LAND

Bangladesh has sought some unused lands from Myanmar for lease for agricultural farming. The leasehold price has been proposed at \$8 to \$25 per acre, reports UNB.

The proposal was made during the official talks between Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and the Myanmar counterpart Nyan Win in Yangon.

"It is still at a preliminary stage," the adviser told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday after his return from Yangon where the two neighbouring countries signed a deal for building a cross-border road.

Briefing on the outcome of the

meeting, the adviser said border trade, delimitation of maritime boundary with Myanmar and repatriation of the Rohingya refugees figured prominently during the meeting.

Both sides have agreed to set up a joint commission at the foreign minister level to discuss all these bilateral issues between the two close neighbours, he said.

About the direct road link between Bangladesh and Myanmar, the adviser said the two sides signed a draft agreement to construct a 25 km road from Guandhum in Cox's Bazar to Baulibazar in Myanmar with the funding from Bangladesh government.

He said a formal agreement will be signed after completing some procedural matters by the two governments.

Communications Secretary Mahbubur Rahman, who initiated the draft agreement, told the reporters that it would take another year to start the construction while the road would be completed in three years at an estimated cost of \$20.20 million.

The foreign adviser said the proposed road will also connect Bangladesh with Thailand and New Zealand through Myanmare.

"The government also did not impose any restriction on my movement," read the press note.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan, former minister Dr Osman Faruk, former state minister Selima Rahnum, and Erman Saleh Prince met Khaleda Zia at her cantonment residence in the capital in the last two days. However, security personnel did not allow the party's Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan and a group of former lawmakers to visit their chief. Saeed Iskandar alleged that law enforcers allowed him to enter his sister's house only after he had obtained permission from the authorities concerned.

Maj Gen (retd) ZA Khan, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, told The Daily Star last night, "We already met our chairperson and I hope all of our party leaders will be allowed to meet her as the government said it had not imposed any restriction on her movement."

He also said Khaleda Zia will go to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah after the ban on indoor politics is lifted.

Meanwhile, the BNP chairperson's movement seems to be restricted still.

A home ministry press note however said earlier that the government never pressured and is not pressuring Khaleda Zia to take a trip overseas.

Judiciary clean-up

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appointments in August 2004, there were a daughter and nephews of some BNP lawmakers, while another had been a leader of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Before ending its term in October 2006, the alliance government confirmed the appointments of the judges it had appointed including that of Faisal Mahmud Faizee, whose confirmation had not been recommended by the chief justice.

In the last five years, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) constantly protested against appointments of judges on the basis of their political affiliations instead of their merit, the practice of ignoring the chief justice's recommendations in the confirmation process, and the practice of elevating the High Court judges to the Appellate Division by superceding senior justices.

The SCBA was also vocal about the appointments of judges against whom there are specific allegations of corruption. Under overwhelming evidence and pressure, the alliance government through a supreme judicial council for the first time had to remove Judge Syed Shahidur Rahman on grounds of receiving bribes, whom the same government had appointed.

The SCBA's serious agitations demanding the removal of another judge -- Faisal Mahmud Faizee -- for tampering with his LLB certificate from Chittagong University was however sternly fought back by the alliance government since 2005. The agitation took a serious turn tarnishing the higher judiciary's image. Now, under the new caretaker government, the authorities formed another supreme judicial council after Chittagong University had formally cancelled Faizee's LLB certificate.

The SCBA also protested between 2002 and 2003, when the alliance government chose not to confirm the appointments of the majority of additional judges who had been given the appointments at the very end of the Awami League regime in 2001, and for whom the chief justice had made favourable recommendations.

When such protests were raging, erstwhile law minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed told BBC in February 2003 that the government's actions had been taken in line with the constitution and the laws of the land. The constitution does not oblige the government to comply with the chief justice's recommendations. Moudud's remarks enraged the judiciary, but he held his ground till the last confirmation were made in 2006

2 secretaries quizzed over abandoned house sale

UNB, Dhaka

Two secretaries, facing a corruption case for selling 18 abandoned houses in the city at much lower prices, were interrogated by an anti-corruption taskforce yesterday.

Sources said the taskforce interrogated the two secretaries -- SM Zafrullah and Shahid Alam -- in the conference room of the works ministry for over two hours in the afternoon.

SM Zafrullah, former public works secretary, and Shahid Alam, former civil aviation and tourism secretary, were made OSDs following the filing of the graft case against them.

Assistant Director of the Anti-Corruption Commission Shahidul Alam filed the graft case against SM Zafrullah and Shahid Alam with Motijheel Police Station on March 29 for selling the 18 abandoned houses in the capital's posh areas of Gulshan, Banani, Dhamondi and New Banani through fake auction.

The other accused in the case are former minister for housing and public works Mirza Abbas and nine serving senior bureaucrats.

Their alleged abuse of power caused the government a financial loss of over Tk 127 crore.

CNG 3-wheeler

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fare for the first two kilometres has been raised to Tk 13.50 from Tk 12 and fare for each extra kilometre to Tk 5.50. The new waiting charge will be Tk 0.75 per minute, up from Tk 0.50 per minute.

The drivers will have to pay Tk 450 per day to the vehicle owners instead of the previous Tk 300.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) only operates mobile courts two times a week to check regulation violations by motorists on the city roads. This measure has proven inadequate.

Complaints against defiant CNG drivers and their owners will still have to be reported to the police -- a system that has also proven ineffective.

Alam, 38, a CNG driver said, "Unless the government ensures our security everywhere, we can't go anywhere in the city the passengers demand."

When contacted, BRTA Chairman Abu Bakar M Shahjahan admitted that some limitations in enforcement still exist.

Mufti Hannan

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under a tight security.

Earlier, Hannan was remanded in the case and he made a confessional statement on November 19 last year.

Ten people died and several others were injured on April 14, 2001 when bombs went off at Ramna Batamul during the Bengali Newyear's celebration.

On June 14, 2001, Maulana Akbar Hussain, one of the arrestees, made a confessional statement to a metropolitan magistrate disclosing involvements of Mufti Hannan and others with the blasts.

JMB MEMBER REMANDED

Another Dhaka court yesterday placed a Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) member on a seven-day remand in connection with bomb blasts at a CPB rally at Paltan in the capital on January 20, 2001.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali Reza passed the remand order when CID Inspector Anwar Hossain produced JMB member Abdullah Al Tanzim before the court with an eight-day remand.

"Why these burdens [incompetent and controversial judges] should be carried for 20 more years? They should be removed through a supreme judicial council," Mahmud added.

Eminent lawyer Dr M Zahir said, "What the chief justice said I don't know for sure. But if there is a problem in the process of appointments of judges, we should resolve that together."

Pro-BNP lawyers' leader TH Khan said, "There are elements of truth in the statement of the chief justice. If there are incompetent and corrupt persons who were appointed as judges, it's the responsibility of the chief justice to remove them."

BNP Law Secretary Advocate Zainul Abedin said politicisation of the judiciary started from the autocratic regime of Ershad and continued throughout the Awami League and BNP regimes. "Those who have been appointed should now try to prove their competence through their performances and sever their political affiliations," he added.

Former secretary of SCBA Enayetur Rahim said, "After the chief justice's comment, the government should not wait 20 years and instead it should look for ways to restore the lost image of the judiciary."

London Gono Forum leader Mokabbir Khan presided over the discussion.

Dr Kamal

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Kamal demanded proper investigation into the allegations against the two leaders, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, saying those who were in power in the past will have to answer to their deeds.

He said the people of Bangladesh will have to take appropriate decision to save the country, which is now in "intensive care unit."

Kamal said "Corruption and terrorism have afflicted the society and now the mass awareness has been created like that of 1971 to get rid of this situation," he told his audience.

The eminent jurist said the nation is now united against corruption, terrorism, black money and dishonest politics, which are responsible for the prevailing situation in the country.

Corrupt people get nominations in exchange for huge money. And later, they loot the national wealth to recover the money they spent to buy party tickets, he said.

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Early polls possible

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officials who will prepare the project proposal. It also formed a high-powered national steering committee headed by the CEC to oversee the task of preparing the electoral roll.

The CEC said the 18-month timeframe announced by him on April 5 began yesterday and the EC is determined to hold the parliamentary election as per the timeframe declared by the chief adviser recently.

The 18-month timeframe will end on October 30 next year while the chief adviser announced that the parliamentary election will be held by the end of 2008.

During the preparation of the voter list, we will start other preparatory works for the polls. So that we can hold the ninth parliamentary election within the timeframe announced by the chief adviser," the CEC told reporters emerging from the meeting with the consultants.

"The parliamentary election will be held earlier if the voter list is prepared before the expiration of the 18-month timeframe," he asserted.

At the meeting the EC asked the consultants to come up with a list of required equipment needed for the job within two weeks so that the commission can start the process of procuring those.

It also asked them to prepare a proposal within three weeks for launching pilot projects in both urban and rural areas to study the feasibility of the project for the voter list and national identity cards.

Besides, they must have the proposal ready within the next two months specifying the methodology for preparing the voter list, the CEC said. "In the project document, the consultants will specify whether the voter list will be prepared through door to door visits or by setting up registration camps," he said.

"From now on, the consultants will work round the clock, they will

have no public or weekly holiday," Huda said.

According to the EC's initial plan, the project proposal for the voter list was supposed to be prepared within two months and procurement of required equipment, like cameras and laptop computers, was supposed to be completed within the following four months. An additional 12 months were allocated for implementation of the project.

But the EC now has a plan to start the process of purchasing the equipment while the project proposal is being prepared, sources said.

CEC Huda said their top priority is to prepare the voter list with photographs, not the national identity cards. "There is no link between the election and the national identity cards," he said. National identity cards will be a by-product of the voter list project, he added.

The CEC said preparing voter lists of metropolitan cities might be given priority. "We will consider whether it is possible to hold city corporation elections before the parliamentary election if voter lists for the cities are prepared earlier," he said.

He also said a national steering committee was formed to oversee the task of preparing the voter list. The two election commissioners Sahul Hossain and Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhat Hossain, secretaries to the EC Secretariat and home ministry, director general of the Bureau of Statistics, and UNDPs local chief were made the members of the committee.

"Rallies are prohibited under the state of emergency. But discussion and cultural programmes on May Day have been permitted for those who have sought prior permission," DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed told the UNB yesterday.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed were made to appear on the occasion, wishing the workers at home and abroad all the best.

The state-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar and private TV channels will air special programmes on the occasion.

Bashar

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team in the series while ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful will act as his deputy. However the 34-year-old Bashar, the most successful Bangladeshi skipper, is all set to quit one-day cricket after the series.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed announced the squad at a press conference saying that they only dropped Rajin Saleh as they had to reduce the team for the home battle.

On the other hand, paceman Tapash Baisya is yet to recover from injury so all-rounder Forhad Reza, who was flown to West Indies in the middle of the World Cup as Tapash's replacement, has been retained.

India have already announced two separate squads for the series.

The first two one-day matches will take place at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on May 10 and 12 and the second will also be held at the same venue from May 25.

After the first two ODIs the sides will travel to Chittagong to play the third and final one-dayer on May 15 and the first Test over May 18-22.

Bangladesh's Test squad would be named during the second one-day match.

May Day

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will observe the day by holding seminars, discussions and cultural programme in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

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The five were among seven men

Shamim Osman

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Osman was sentenced under sub-sections one, two and three of section 26 of the ACC Act. The prison term would take effect upon his arrest.

On February 20, ACC officials hung a copy of a notice on the front door of Osman's residence ordering him to submit the wealth statements to the commission within 72 hours. The officials hung the notice there since they found no one in his residence at 46/11 Haji Abdul Hamid Road in Narayanganj's Jamtala area.

Interpol had issued a worldwide arrest warrant against Osman on April 7 for his alleged links with gunrunning and crimes that involved explosives.

Clarification

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registration against the two mentioned companies (Ring and Orasinvest) that provide warehousing services to Banglalink, have been made till now, the clarification said.

They are cooperating with the VAT authorities in the investigation, the Banglalink authorities said adding they are confident that the investigation would prove that Banglalink is operating in compliance with the VAT rules.

BB asks 10 banks

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Commission (ACC) for in-depth probe and taking legal actions. The central bank investigation found that Nurunnabi swindled Tk 628 crore out of 10 banks in the port city showing false documents of his 32 companies."

5 British bomb plotters