

## 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 on 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 his 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 China through Myanmar.

## Khaleda's brother

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pressure' for leaving the country.

The schedule for her departure however has not been finalised yet as she has not gotten a visa for entering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

According to the source, Saeed Iskandar will take up the charge of acting chairperson of the party if Khaleda is to leave for Saudi Arabia and if she is to stay there for a prolonged period.

Iskandar however told reporters that he is not ready to take up the responsibility during the party chairperson's visit to Saudi Arabia.

BNP leaders said Khaleda will leave for Saudi Arabia after the ban on indoor politics is lifted, in spite of the 'tremendous pressure' on her for going abroad.

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.

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

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Maj Gen (ret'd) ZA Khan, former minister Dr Osman Farruk, former state minister Selima Rahman, and Emran 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 (ret'd) 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.

## 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 superseding senior judges.

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 the 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 confirmations were made in 2006

ignoring all opposing opinions.

Retired Supreme Court judge Ghulam Rabbani told The Daily Star yesterday, "Between 1992 and 2002, there had not been any controversy or grievance over the appointments of the judges. The judges were also very capable."

"When the chief justice himself has noted that there is a problem within the judiciary this means he is telling the truth based on his own experience. Now the duty of the chief justice is to request the president to form a supreme judicial council to clear up the mess," Rabbani noted.

On May 20, 2002 the High Court Division bench gave its observation that the Supreme Court recommendations on appointments must be made effective and meaningful. In the selection of judges, backgrounds of nominees must be checked and cross-checked as a precautionary measure, and the executive branch should keep the appointments above politics.

Former SCBA president and Bangladesh Bar Council Vice-chairman Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud welcomed the chief justice's comment saying that his comment echoed what the SCBA has been saying for the last few years.

"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."

## 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, Dhanmondi and New Eskaton 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 Batumal during the Bengali New Year'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'atu 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 prayer.

### 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 whole 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.

London Gono Forum leader Mokabbir Khan presided over the discussion.

## 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 implementing 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 (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain, secretaries to the EC Secretariat and home ministry, director general of the Bureau of Statistics, and UNDP's local chief were made the members of the committee.

The CEC said four consultants including two from abroad already joined the EC and another will join later.

About the ongoing controversy over student politics, the CEC said the EC will examine the laws whether it is possible to de-link student politics from political parties, short of banning it altogether.

### 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 Bangladesh 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 into 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 Test 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-day 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.

"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 Fakhruddin Ahmed have issued separate messages 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 on the day, while the newspapers bring out special supplements on the occasion.

### Children

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not achieve the goal as the targeted was improper and it failed to reach the targeted people.

"The Government's Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development (IGVGD) could not cover even one third of the total targeted people. Monitoring system was also poor," said a Save the Children UK source, adding that existing legislation is antiquated and fragmented and deals only with children working in the formal sectors.

"The child labour policy has not yet been finalised," said Chief Technical Adviser of International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPECL) of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Ronald E Berghuyf, adding that government has not yet determined what the hazardous sectors, occupations and activities are and so it is difficult to do something.

"The official figures show a very small declining of child labour in formal sectors," he continued, the major effort is now in policy-level work, making legislation and reforms to address the main reason behind child labour and also their rehabilitation.

While talking to The Daily Star Adviser to the Caretaker Government Geeteara Safiya Choudhury, concerned for the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, said she came to know about the child labour policy a few days ago and asked the secretary concerned to update her.

"Of course the country should have a child labour policy and I will do whatever necessary for its formulation and implementation," she said.

However, a "National time-bound programme on the elimination of the worst form of child labour" has started in January this year in collaboration with the government and the non-government organisations (NGOs) to prevent children entering into hazardous labour and at the same time rehabilitate the children who are already engaged in hazardous jobs.

"It is a very positive beginning as the comprehensive and holistic approach involving different stakeholders will work for the informal economy, both in rural and urban areas, by building capacity of institutions and through advocacy and poverty reduction," said Berghuyf, the ILO representative.

### Buddha Purnima

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plant sapling of a banyan tree at Merul Badda International Bouddha Bihar on the eve of the day. Buddha attained his nirvana under such a tree, a press release said.

Former prime ministers Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina and BNP chief Khaleda Zia both gave separate messages on the occasion.

Buddha Purnima will be celebrated at all monasteries across the country through daylong programmes. Special prayers will also be offered seeking peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

Separate press releases of Bangladesh Buddhist Federation and Bangladesh Bouddha Kristi Prochar Sangha said they will organise discussion meetings, colourful processions and other religious programmes.

Newspapers will publish articles while radio and TV channels will air special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

## 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.

As Osman failed to submit the wealth statements, ACC Deputy Director (DD) of Narayanganj Benazir Ahmed filed a case on April 4 at the Senior Special Judge's Court citing Article 26 of the ACC Act, 2004 and Section 15 D (5) of the Emergency Powers Rule, 2007.

The court issued an arrest warrant against Osman immediately after the case was filed.

On April 11, the police raided Osman's home but found nothing but a broken bed and an iron almira, which they seized. They prepared a charge sheet against Osman on April 12.

Two of the four state witnesses of the case -- court assistant Abdul Motalib Sarkar and Osman's neighbour Haji Nuruddin Ahmed -- testified to court on April 23 and 24, but the other two state witnesses failed to appear before the court.

The hearing of the arguments took place on April 25 before the verdict was finally delivered yesterday.

Before the verdict was deliv-

ered yesterday, Osman's lawyers told the court that since the High Court on April 25 ordered the ACC to accept Osman's wealth statements, even if a representative of him submitted it, this case against Osman is not valid.

The public prosecutor Nabi Hossain told the court that the HC never issued an order to stay the case. The judge then read out the 20-page verdict sentencing Osman to three years in jail. Nabi later termed the verdict a "milestone".

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

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Clarke, said the five were "trained, dedicated, ruthless terrorists" who had links with al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

The five were among seven men alleged to have conspired to bomb a central London nightclub and shopping centre, bring down a plane as well as hit gas and electricity supplies, killing hundreds in the process.

One of them also discussed trying to buy a radioactive "dirty bomb" from the Russian mafia to be "bigger than 9/11", but nothing appeared to have come from his enquiries, Britain's longest-running terrorism trial was told.

But there were calls for a renewed inquiry after revelations that one of the convicted, Omar Khayam, boasted of working for al-Qaeda's number three, Abdul Hadi, and who also had links to the London suicide bombers in 2005.

This information was kept from jurors during the year-long trial, for fear of prejudicing their deliberations.

US authorities announced last Friday that Hadi, also known as Abdul al-Hadi al-Iraqi, had been captured and taken to the US-run Guantanamo Bay detention camp for security suspects in Cuba.

Khayam, 25, met the presumed ringleader of the London suicide bombings, Mohammed Sidique Khan, in terrorist training camps in Pakistan and at least four times in England, while the former was under surveillance by Britain's domestic intelligence service, MI5, in the final stages of plotting.

He also met another of the bombers, Shehzad Tanweer, but MI5 assessed that Khan and Tanweer were "peripheral" figures. They and two other bombers went on to kill themselves and 52 others, as well as injure more than 700, on London transport on July 7, 2005.

The British government has previously said there was no warning before the 2005 attacks in

London. Revelations of a link with Khayam immediately prompted calls for an inquiry from opposition parties and relatives of those who died.

"The consequences of that level of incompetence were such that my son was killed. That is truly appalling," said Graham Foulkes, who lost his 22-year-old son, David.

But the chairman of the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, Labour lawmaker Paul Murphy, said they remained satisfied there were "no culpable failures" by the security services in relation to intelligence.

In its official report into the July 7 bombings two years ago, Murphy's committee last year said the failure to identify Khan was a "missed opportunity".

Home Secretary John Reid said the fight against terrorism was an "endless, continuous task", but added: "Very dangerous terrorists are now behind bars due to the efforts of our security services and our police."

The seven accused were arrested on March 30, 2004 after more than half a ton of ammonium nitrate fertiliser was discovered in a storage facility in west London.

Khayam, Anthony Garcia, 25, Jawad Akbar, 23, Waheed Mahmood, 35, and 32-year-old Salahuddin Amin were all convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions likely to endanger life.

Two of their co-defendants -- Shujah Mahmood, 20, and 22-year-old Nabeel Hussain -- were cleared of the same charge.

Khayam and Garcia were found guilty of possessing 600 kilograms of the chemical for terrorist purposes. Hussain, who faced the same charge, was cleared.

Khayam was also convicted of possessing aluminium powder for terrorist purposes. Shujah Mahmood was cleared of that charge.

All the men denied the charges.

## Rebel attacks

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agents said, adding that those flying to Singapore were now being offered flights routed through southern India and the Maldives.

Flights to the airport, located just outside the capital, were diverted after rebel aircraft were spotted in its air space early Sunday.

Flights were disrupted by air defence systems, officials said, adding that one Indian jet was turned back and several departing flights were delayed.

During two of the three bombing raids by the Tamil Tigers, rebel planes crossed one of the main international flight paths