

## BB declines L/C

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various points in the ground was reported by locals more than three years back -- this also gives the BGFCL some time to rethink whether the remedial task should cover more work than just fixing well-3.

The GSM deal only focussed on well-3 that was leaking huge gas since late 2003. The Bapex undertook a remedial action on April 13 this year, and after a couple of days' operation, it did not proceed further fearing explosion. But eventually the unfinished intervention improved the well's condition with gas production from that well shooting up to 32 million cubic feet per day (mmcfd) from 15 mmcfd previously. The well is still leaking more than 1 mmcfd gas.

Experts of the BGFCL and Bapex say the problem with well-3 is far from over. "The well head gas pressure is around 1,000 pressure per inch (PSI) whereas that at other wells is 1,800 PSI," said a top official. "In other words, source of the well-3 problem is still there, though externally it looks better than before."

He went on, "Again nobody can say it for sure that well-3 alone is the source of gas leakage in Titas area. You must remember gas is leaking through the ground at places that are two to four kilometres from well-3. Our experts as well as those of Chevron and PTTEP believe that there might also be some other sources of the problem."

Another official said, "We are

living with fire, and we must immediately reduce the level of risk with well-3."

Against this backdrop, prior to a remedial action there should be a proper assessment of Titas field's problems. Some of the field's 16 wells have developed troubles and these need to be addressed as well.

"The BGFCL has struck a deal with the Bapex to conduct a 3 dimensional seismic survey, which will reveal the health and actual reserve condition of the field and help us understand the problem. But that is very time consuming. We need to do something fast," the official added.

Sparse gas leakage through various points in the ground in Brahmanbaria had been noticed for the last three to five years. But since the last dry season, the situation has become alarming. Local villagers and farmers had told The Daily Star in February that gas was leaking from more than 3,000 big holes -- including some 30-foot diameter holes -- in IRRI paddy fields, water bodies and the Titas river. Gas emitted through some of the holes are burning with high flames.

Titas field produces 400 mmcfd gas as against the country's total gas demand of 1500 mmcfd. 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).

## Prothom Alo

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three main aims--legal reforms, preparing a credible and proper voter list, and creating an environment conducive to elections, he added.

Huda said a draft prepared by the EC for electoral reform has already been proposed but the EC cannot finalise the draft without discussing the matter with the political parties.

Former caretaker government adviser Manzur Elahi said while it is good to hold dialogues with the civil society and the press, the major challenge ahead for the EC is to convince the political parties about the effectiveness of the EC reforms.

Both Elahi and legal expert Asif Nazrul said a ban on indoor politics does not preclude the EC from having a dialogue with the political parties as it will be a "constructive discussion" on reforms rather than a "political activity". They stressed the need for accelerating these decisions to quicken steps towards elections.

The CEC stated that the second goal of the EC is to create a fair and proper voters registration system that will leave behind a "widely criticised" voter list.

He referred to several studies suggesting that 18.3 percent voters on the previous voter list are fake. Creating a new database would be less time-consuming than correcting the old one, he said.

A few speakers at the discussion, however, differed in this regard and came down hard on Huda for the EC decision to prepare photo ID and ask people to come to registration camps rather than EC officials visiting door-to-door.

Former attorney general Hasan Arif said the EC will not only have to go to the Supreme Court (SC) for a reference but also pass amendments to avoid door-to-door visit.

He was referring to an SC decision last year which said election officials will have to go door-to-door to prepare a voter list.

Former adviser Maj Gen (retd) Mainul Hossain Chowdhury asked the CEC not to confide voter list and voter ID cards as they will have to face legal tangles in future.

Election Commissioner Sahakat Hossain said if they were to go door-to-door to prepare the voter list with photographs, they will need 36 months instead of 18 to complete the task.

Another Election Commissioner Sahul Hossain said the EC is not bound by the SC decision for door-to-door visits due to the unusual political context and the different mode of making the electoral register.

Asif Nazrul said a presidential ordinance will be sufficient in this regard.

The CEC also emphasised the EC's aim to create an environment conducive to elections whereby the opportunities for exuberant spending on elections and the use of muscle in elections would be eliminated or reduced for a fairer political platform for candidates.

Hasan Arif also endorsed the view that instead of limiting expenditure, the EC should be looking to restrict the opportunities given to candidates to splash money for their advantage.

Former adviser Mainul asked the EC if it wants to hold elections under the state of emergency. "Withdraw the emergency and then you can see who still participate in the election and who boycott it," he said.

Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) trustee board Chairman Prof Muzaffar Ahmed said the people are as important as politicians in the election process. He called for a total ban on candidates who have been tainted as corrupt and rallies and processions for election campaigning.

Former adviser Rokia Afzal Rahman said the electoral reform should have greater attention from the authorities to ensure greater representation of women in the elections.

Others present at the discussion were Badul Alam Mazumdar of Citizens for Good Governance, Nagarik Committee member M Syeduzzaman and Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Quaiyum.

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman moderated the session.

## AL, BNP hail

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chief's remarks relating to assisting the present caretaker government from behind the scenes is the reflection of everybody's desire.

Jalil termed baseless the adviser's apprehension that there will be a reappearance of the previous situation if the ban on indoor politics is lifted.

To a query on party reforms by force, he said, "Awami League is not used to acting on instructions of others. We do politics from our obligation to the country and people. If required, we will bring intra-party reforms but not on anybody's diktat."

He said his party chief Sheikh Hasina is now exchanging views on the intra-party reform issue with the central leaders and has requested them to come up with their individual views, ideas and opinions on reforms.

About his proposition on reforms in the political parties, government and parliament, Jalil said it complies with the 31-point reform proposals of the 14-party combine.

He reiterated that his party would surely take action against any leaders of the party if convicted for corruption in a court of law.

For ensuring transparency and accountability of a new political party, the AL leader suggested formulation of guidelines so that

no political parties without defining their aims and objectives and working among the people for three to five years are allowed to participate in elections.

Referring to the Election Commission's decision on distribution of voters' forms door to door, he said, "The commission is trying to come to a final decision in consultation with all including the political parties."

Asked whether the AL will go to the EC individually or along with the 14-party combine for consultation on the issue, he said, "We can choose either of the options as our ideas and opinions as well as aims and objectives regarding electoral reforms are similar to that of the 14-party combine."

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement said, "The brave armed forces have saved the country from a conflicting and uncertain situation by assisting the present caretaker government."

Bhuiyan said Moeen's speech has paved the way of holding a free and fair election, carrying out reforms in necessary cases and freeing the country from corruption and terrorism.

The patriotic armed forces have upheld their image, he said.

He urged them to continue to do so in future.

## EC plans

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referring to the EC's original plan to form 8,000 teams to prepare the voter list with photographs.

The secretary, however, repeatedly said the progress of the task would largely be depended on voters' turnout for registering their names in the new voter list.

He said the enumerators would make door-to-door visits and distribute voters' registration forms to collect particulars of voters. They will also help the eligible voters to fill in the forms, he added.

One will have to come to the voters' registration centres to have one's photographs and fingerprints taken for the voter list and national identity cards.

The secretary said the pilot project, which will begin on June 10 in Sripur municipality of Gazipur district, would help the EC finalise the methodology of preparing the voter list.

The secretary said the EC has sought Tk 350 crore from the government for conducting electoral activities.

## Rab captures

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Acting on a tip-off, Rab held Nawab from Karwan Bazar on

Tuesday after Shahbagh Police Station sent a copy of the general diary filed by the press club authorities to the director of Rab-3, the press release added.

Following information extracted from him, the Rab members arrested Shahbagh Police Station yesterday. The Rab also recovered the cellphone with SIM from his possession through which some callers identifying themselves as "Jadid al Qaeda" members threatened to bomb the Jatiya Press Club.

On May 8, the press club authorities received a letter from the militant outfit that read "the press club will be blown up within 10 days." Besides, the threat was issued over cellphone several times.

Shahin Chowdhury, convenor of the security sub-committee of the press club, filed a general diary with the Shahbagh police the following day.

## Ctg mayor

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with Chittagong Kotwali Police Station yesterday. Abu Mohammad Arif Sifidqi, ACC, director of Chittagong zone, filed the case.

Yesterday, Chamber Judge of the Supreme Court, M Hassan Ameen passed the stay order following an application moved by the government seeking leave-to-appeal against the High Court order.

The judge also referred the application to the SC full bench for hearing.

On May 17, the High Court upon a petition had granted the detained mayor bail for three months in a graft case on health grounds. But, he could not come out of jail as the detention order against him was in force.

Mohiuddin was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital from Bandarban jail on May 14 following a heart attack. Later, he was shifted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University in the capital as his condition deteriorated.

Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam

appeared for petitioner Hasina Mohiuddin, wife of the mayor, while Attorney General Fida M Kamal stood for the state.

In Chittagong, the mayor along with four others has been sued in charge of incurring a loss of Tk 83.05 lakh in purchase of six trucks in 2006-07.

Four others accused in the case are CCC Chief Engineer Moktar Alam and Engineer Abul Hasan and truck dealers Sajid Hossain and Almugir Hossain.

In the case, the ACC director alleged that the mayor in connivance with the CCC engineers and truck dealers has purchased six old trucks showing as new.

CCC Engineer Abul Hasan, arrested by the joint forces last month on charge of pilferage of fuel oil, is now in jail.

## Ex-BNP MP

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the freedom fighters during the

war of independence.

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He was however, surrendered to the police later on February 14.

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Calling on finding out ways to remove the inefficient justices, Justice KM Sobhan said systematic changes are necessary in the judiciary and the Bar Council should get more power and salaries of the judges should be increased.

At this point Suranjit Sengupta

## Global corruption

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GCR 2007 simultaneously from Dhaka, London and Berlin. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) released the report at a roundtable discussion held at Biman Multipurpose Auditorium with its senior trustee Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid in the chair.

TIB treasurer M Hafizzuddin Khan moderated the session while Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman presented the GCR 2007.

Among others, Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury, Justice KM Sobhan, Prof Moniruzzaman Mian, Justice Abdur Rouf, Justice Golam Rabbani, Awami League President Member Suranjit Sengupta, Col (retired) Shawki Ali, Dr Enamul Haque and Taleya Rehman spoke.

"Two thirds of the people who used a court in 2004 paid bribes, with the typical bribe amounting to 25 percent of average annual income," the report says, adding that judicial reform is underway but unfolding slowly and sometimes with limited effect.

It also said, "77 Supreme Court justices and 750 other judges cover a population of nearly 150 million and the salary structure for the judges in the countryside is insufficient, and discourages capable persons from joining the judiciary."

According to the report, "Judicial corruption erodes the foundation of the society as it allows criminals to go unpunished, destroying effective governance and democratic participation. It diminishes trade and economic growth also."

"Ordinary people suffer from judicial corruption as demanding bribes for a speedy trial erodes the rule of law and undermines confidence in the justice system," the report says, adding that an impartial judiciary must be based on transparency.

"Judicial and prosecutorial appointments and removals must be transparent, independent of the executive and legislative branches and based on experience and performance," the TIB report says.

The TIB recommended that journalists must be able to monitor and comment on legal proceedings freely, bringing reliable information on laws, propose changes in the legislations, court procedures and judgements to the public.

The prosecution must conduct judicial proceedings in public and publish reasons for decisions," the TIB suggested.

Suggesting the set up of "elders council" that would be composed of three former chief justices to appoint justices, former chief justice M Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury said corruption has taken a turn into "blood cancer" and it would not be eradicated if nepotism, favouritism are not stopped.

He also said, "The chief justice should be provided with more power so that he can take actions against the corrupt people in judiciary," adding that judges should be given the opportunity to work independently.

"The chief justice should also be strong in keeping the district judges corruption free," the former chief justice observed rejecting any links between corruption and the provision to make former chief justices the chief of caretaker government.

Emphasising the need for "human quality" improvement of the judges, Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid said judges should be provided proper training.

He also said the judiciary should be a self-regulating body and a responsible press must act as the guardian.

"No institution can sustain ignoring the society but many things were done in last 20 years keeping the people in the dark," he said.

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At this point Suranjit Sengupta

## AL starts

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As part of its move, the AL yesterday sought information from the US, UK, Australia and the EU about funding of political parties and elections in those countries.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday sent separate letters to diplomatic missions of those countries in Dhaka seeking that information. He also made telephone calls to the missions and received positive response in this regard, sources said.

"Politics cannot be transparent without transparent funding. We will seek funds for election-related expenditures from the Election Commission and funds from the government for the party's operation," a source said.

The AL high command is also working on how to make a database comprising all workers of the party. The party will prepare a list of all its leaders and members with their photographs and they will be given identity cards.

Meanwhile, the AL president and former prime minister has already senior party leaders and members of its advisory council also to prepare separate draft proposals for party reforms.

"Party chief Sheikh Hasina has requested its central leaders to come up with their individual ideas and opinions on party reforms in black and white. We will analyse those at the party central working committee meeting following," Jallil told reporters yesterday.

Sources close to Hasina told this correspondent that she is sincerely trying to reform her party by strengthening internal democracy, bringing transparency in party funding and modernising the system of induction of members into the party.

In recent times, political leaders, members of the civil society, the EC and some advisers to the caretaker government have stressed reforming political parties to institutionalise internal democracy and transparency in their functioning.

Hasina is regularly consulting party leaders and others concerned on taking collective decisions, holding party councils in time, establishing accountability at all levels and taking actions against corrupt and criminal party members.