

## Reserved gas blocks

FROM PAGE 1

system is an easy by-pass for a competitive bidding and this ensures low risk investment for foreign oil companies. At the same time, it practically gives away local resources to foreign companies at nominal prices.

Sources said a controversial Petrobangla high official, under the influence of certain local agents of foreign oil companies, has prompted this move. He has justified this suggestion on ground of lack of finances.

"This is just a lame excuse. Financing oil and gas exploration projects did not get due priorities in the past though the contribution of Petrobangla's companies are significant. There were always adequate funds and a lack of political will," said an energy ministry high official.

Nine companies under Petrobangla annually contribute more than Tk 3,000 crore to the national exchequer as tax, supplementary duties and profit.

"More importantly, three gas production and exploration companies -- Bangladesh Gas Field Company (BGFL), Sylhet Gas Field Company (SGFL) and the lone exploration company Bangladesh Exploration Company (Bapex) -- annually pay Tk 1,800 crore to the government as tax and supplementary duties. As per the company rules, these companies are supposed to be able to keep 20 percent of their earnings, which does not happen," he said.

"The government in 1994 had given away the discovered Jalalabad gas field with its proven 1.5 tcf gas to Occidental (now Chevron) but why? Back then Bapex asked for just Tk 200 crore to drill wells and set up gas processing plants to develop this field but the government said there is no fund. Then after Occidental developed it and started supplying gas, the government paid the foreign company Tk 300 crore in just one year as payment of gas," the official noted.

"I see self-contradictory actions, and not lack of fund," he added.

A Petrobangla official asked, "Is it really difficult for the government to allocate Tk 100 crore a year to each of these three companies to allow them to explore and develop the resources?"

He went on, "Alternatively, the government can simply give Bapex a one-time allocation of Tk 500 crore to

build its own business and contribute to the nation." In India, the national oil company ONGC was given 500 crore rupees as one-time investment a couple of decades back. Now, this company has turned into a Rs 30,000 crore giant.

In 2004, Bapex was forced to sign a controversial joint venture deal with Canadian company Niko resources to develop "marginal" (previously used) gas fields owned by Bapex. In the list of three fields, one field -- Chhatak (or Tengtratia) was unexplored and therefore deserved, at least, open tender to ensure competent and fair exploration programmes.

Incompetent company Niko caused two rounds of blowouts in Tengtratia area, which experts believe has the potential of one trillion cubic feet of gas.

"It seems we have either stopped believing in ourselves, or we are too eager to give everything away to foreign companies for personal gains," said a senior official. "The Niko deal is a glaring example of how we undermine our own interest, and how can Petrobangla want to follow that example?"

### PETROBANGLA'S MOVE

Earlier on July 3, in a letter to the energy secretary Petrobangla set the ground for the idea of JVA. The letter notes that the country is presently producing 1,800 million cubic feet per day (mmcfid) gas against a demand for 1,750 mmcfid. Gas demand is projected to go up to 1,800 mmcfid in 2008 and 2,850 mmcfid in 2012. Therefore, the country must take up programmes to enhance gas supplies.

In its two-page letter describing the history of exploration activities and block bidding in the country, Petrobangla said the country has taken the initiative for off-shore block bidding this year and taken legal steps to lift the court injunction on signing new Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs). It said in the upcoming bid offering 23 blocks, oil companies might be interested in blocks 15, 22, 3 and 4.

Then it went on suggesting that Bapex may open its ring-fenced areas of Sitakunda, Kamta, Mobarakpur, Semutang, Patharia etc and blocks 8 and 11 reserved for Bapex for joint venture deals with foreign companies.

The energy ministry on July 16 issued a letter on "On-shore" oil and

gas exploration programme announcing a government decision to take legal measures to withdraw court injunction on signing PSCs and to take steps to sign JVAs in ring-fenced and reserved areas of Bapex.

### RING-FENCED RESOURCES

Other than two large blocks of 8 and 11, Bapex was given exclusive rights to several zones where previous exploration indicated strong possibilities of oil and gas resources.

The Kapatia and North Bhairab gas structures are relatively smaller but there are strong indications of gas resources there. The Kamta gas structure located in block 9 also has similar promises.

A foreign company named Steinback explored another zone called Hazipur in 1952 and discovered oil. With technologies of those days, the reserve was marked as small, while most geologists now believe it has a great potential.

The country's biggest gas structure discovered so far is Sitakunda, located in block 15. But this 70 km by 10 km structure is situated in a hilly belt full of faults, making it technically difficult for Bapex to undertake conventional exploration programme.

The Sitakunda structure has 48 gas seepage points in the surface and three oil seepage. Foreign oil companies had drilled four wells there between 1910 and 1914, and Petrobangla drilled one in 1983. This zone demands patient and high tech exploration programme because we believe, once we can access this field, it will produce both oil and gas," said an official.

The Patia zone located in block 16 also has a 40 km by 15 km large gas structure where foreign oil company PPL drilled a well in 1952. "During those times, they used thicker mud (twice the density of water) drilling. Such drilling can stop gas from coming out, and therefore they did not discover gas. Nowadays we use mud with equal density of water. We believe if we undertake drilling programmes now, we will find gas there," he added.

The Jaldi structure also spreads around a significant 32 km by 7 km area. Gas was discovered there in 1964 when explorers drilled three wells there.

The energy ministry on July 16 issued a letter on "On-shore" oil and

## Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16

"I cannot go to them due to the changed situation, but I will stand beside them if I get the chance," she said in a statement signed by Mohiuddin Khan Mohon, former assistant press secretary to the prime minister.

She said, "The flood situation is deteriorating day by day. Better preparations and necessary steps should be taken to protect lives and properties."

Urging the authorities concerned to be more careful, she said they should be prepared for post-flood rehabilitations as many people lose their properties and livelihood due to river erosion. Besides crops are damaged and different diseases break out during that time, she added.

She said, "Natural calamities cannot be prevented but it is possible to minimise casualties and damages by handling the crisis efficiently."

## Fertiliser crisis

FROM PAGE 16

more Ru and M Harun-or-Rashid, teacher of a kindergarten school, to 3 years and 4 months imprisonment and Tk 6,000, in default, to suffer more four months.

Another accused Abdur Rahim, a farmer, was acquitted.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Shamsul Haq filed the case accusing the three persons as they tried to stage a drama in protest of "fertiliser crisis" in front of Dumurhat UNO office on March 27 this year, police said.

After examining the witnesses and records, the Judge of the Speedy Trial Tribunal Yusuf Ali handed down the verdict.

## Road link

FROM PAGE 1

Supporting the road-link project, which will link Dhaka with Kunming via Myanmar, Yang said it is a "constructive idea" that would encourage people-to-people contact.

He suggested that a tripartite meeting could be held after technical experts conduct a feasibility study on the project.

Yang also thanked Itekhbar for Dhaka's continuing support for Beijing's "One China" policy.

Itekhbar invited Yang in Bangladesh. Accepting the invitation, Yang said, "It is his dream to visit the country which is not just a close neighbour but such a dear friend."

## Manju seized

FROM PAGE 16

The speedboats were kept at the jetty under strict watch.

Sources said Manju bought the speedboats when he was the communications minister.

He used one of the three to reach his constituency at Bhandaria in Pirojpur from the capital in the shortest possible time while his staff used the rest two.

Manju also used the speedboats during his election campaign in 2001, sources added.

He asked the ACC to respond to the legal notice by August 5.

Sheikh Hasina along with her husband has to submit wealth statement to the ACC by August 8.

## CA says govt ready

FROM PAGE 1

Bagua Anantapur High School and College at Anatapur in the Upazila upazila in the morning.

Earlier, the chief adviser took a helicopter tour over the flood-affected areas of the district and saw for himself the flood situation and the havoc caused by the flood.

Expressing satisfaction over the government activities to help the flood victims, Fakhrudin said coordination committees at district and upazila levels, comprising civil administration, army, and NGOs, are working round the clock to tackle the situation.

Relying to a volley of questions from the reporters, the chief adviser said his government, after assessing the situation, would formulate projects to reconstruct and strengthen various embankments in the next dry session for long-term flood prevention and thus saving lives, property and crops.

Eighty-three medical teams are working in the district as diarrhoea has broken out in many flood-hit areas, affecting 10,500 people have taken shelter.

So far, the government has distributed 222 metric tons of rice and Tk 3.4 lakh among the flood-affected people of the nine upazilas. It has also set up 50 flood centres in the district where some 10,500 people have taken shelter.

Food and Disaster Management Adviser Tapan Chowdury, Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt General Masududdin Chowdury and CA's Press Secretary Sayed Fahim Munain, among others, accompanied the chief adviser.

Rangpur Area Commander and GOC of Rangpur Cantonment Major General Fatemi Ahmed Roomy, Kurigram DCAR Molla and other civil and military high officials were also present during the CA's visit to the flood-affected areas in Upazila.

He left Upazila at noon for Dhaka and saw various flood-affected areas of Sirajganj district from helicopter.

## EC wants new law

FROM PAGE 1

of Tk 2,000," a source said quoting the EC proposal.

Discouraging or asking someone not to register their names in the voter list with photographs by visiting voter registration centres will be considered as a punishable offence under this law, he added.

Besides, the EC sought power to formulate rules and authority to ask any government offices to provide information, if necessary, for preparing the voter list.

Interestingly, the Council of Advisers on July 21 approved in principle the previous EC proposals to amend the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982.

The draft of Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982 (amendment) Ordinance 2007 was also sent to the law ministry for scrutiny. The law ministry, however, sent it back to the EC on last Thursday with some queries and asked to change the language of the proposals to Bangla.

On Sunday and Monday, the EC held meetings over the issue and looked for options to avoid further controversy and conflict with a Supreme Court (SC) verdict regarding the voter list.

The meetings also reviewed the previous bitter experiences in preparing the voter list. In the past one year, the SC declared the voter list prepared for the stalled ninth parliamentary elections null and void, as it was prepared ignoring the electoral laws and court directives.

Some legal experts have also questioned the EC move to prepare the voter list with photographs despite the SC directives for updating the existing electoral voter list in line with the

current electoral rolls ordinance.

Amid growing concern over the fate of the new venture of the voter list with photographs, the EC finally decided to go for a new law repealing the existing electoral rolls ordinance, sources said.

The EC now hopes that the council of advisers will approve its proposals in its next meeting and the president will promulgate an ordinance to make the new law, as the chief adviser is scheduled to inaugurate the field level task for preparing the voter list in RCC area on August 5. However, the field level task in the area began unofficially from July 29.

Officials in the Cabinet Division said the proposals would be placed in the next meeting of the Council of Advisers.

"It is now our target to include the Election Commission's proposals in the meeting agenda whenever it is held," a senior official told The Daily Star.

Interestingly, the Council of Advisers on July 21 approved in principle the previous EC proposals to amend the Electoral Rolls Ordinance, 1982.

The draft of Electoral Rolls Ordinance 1982 (amendment) Ordinance 2007 was also sent to the law ministry for scrutiny. The law ministry, however, sent it back to the EC on last Thursday with some queries and asked to change the language of the proposals to Bangla.

On Sunday and Monday, the EC held meetings over the issue and looked for options to avoid further controversy and conflict with a Supreme Court (SC) verdict regarding the voter list.

The meetings also reviewed the previous bitter experiences in preparing the voter list. In the past one year, the SC declared the voter list prepared for the stalled ninth parliamentary elections null and void, as it was prepared ignoring the electoral laws and court directives.

Some legal experts have also questioned the EC move to prepare the voter list with photographs despite the SC directives for updating the existing electoral voter list in line with the

## Floods cause huge damage

FROM PAGE 1

Mozaffar Ahmad.

The Padma was flowing 136cm and 92cm above danger levels at Goalundo and Bhagyalakshmi yesterday and is likely to rise further inundating more areas of Manikganj, Munshiganj, Faridpur, Rajbari, Madaripur, Sharirkhan and Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas of Dhaka, according to Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

The Shitalakshya was flowing 6cm above danger level at Narayanganj and Tongi canals was flowing 4cm above danger level at Tongi, while the Balu at Demra is likely to cross danger level in a day and the Turag at Mirpur in the next two days.

The Meghna was flowing 40cm above danger level at Bhairab Bazar yesterday and is likely to swell further inundating low-lying areas of Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria and Narayanganj.

Our correspondent from Kishoreganj reports: Floodwater from northern districts is entering the haor areas of the district deteriorating the flood situation there. Nikaupur upazila remains cut off from the rest of the district as Kishoreganj-Nikle road was washed away at Pachkholi and Kholsha five days ago.

Our correspondent from Gaibandha reports: New areas of Gaibandha Sadar, Fulchhari and Shaghata upazilas were flooded as breaches developed in different embankments along the western bank of the Brahmaputra and Ghaghat.

People who took shelter on the embankment along the western bank of the Brahmaputra are living in makeshift sheds and are suffering from food and drinking water shortages.

According to the state-owned news agency, train communication between Jamalpur-Sarishabari and Islampur-Dewanganj has been suspended.

Our correspondent in Narayanganj reports: New low-lying areas of the town were inundated, while the Shitalakshya was flowing 30cm over the danger level at Baniadi point of Rupganj and the Meghna 33cm above danger level at Sonargaon yesterday.

A correspondent from Faridpur reports: Six lakh people have been affected by the flood in 60 unions of eight upazilas of the district. An embankment at Minshabazar collapsed inundating Dhaka-Barisal Highway at Manikganj.

Our correspondent from Tangail reports: Only a small portion of over 3.5 lakh flood-affected people in the district received relief, while the 15 flood shelters the government set up is inadequate.

Many flood-affected people of Sadullapur, Gala, Pitchuria, Mogra,

Boro Basalia and Vaeta of Sadar upazila took shelter on Tangail-Mogra Road along with their livestock.

A correspondent from Munshiganj reports: 50,000 people living near Mawa-Bhagyalakshmi embankment are under threat as breaches that developed in the embankment Monday is yet to be repaired.

Our correspondent from Kishoreganj reports: Floodwater from northern districts is entering the haor areas of the district deteriorating the flood situation there. Nikaupur upazila remains cut off from the rest of the district as Kishoreganj-Nikle road was washed away at Pachkholi and Kholsha five days ago.

Our correspondent from Gaibandha reports: New areas of Gaibandha Sadar, Fulchhari and Shaghata upazilas were flooded as breaches developed in different embankments along the western bank of the Brahmaputra and Ghaghat.

People who took shelter on the embankment along the western bank of the Brahmaputra are living in makeshift sheds and are suffering from food and drinking water shortages.

According to the state-owned news agency, train communication between Jamalpur-Sarishabari and Islampur-Dewanganj has been suspended.

The floods damaged about 400 metres of two bank-protected of the Teesta at Dakshin Sonakholi and Vedbari.

Our staff correspondent from Sylhet reports: Over 300 vehicles were stranded as the road link between Sylhet and Companiganj and Gowainghat upazilas snapped following severe landslide at Barsala early yesterday. However, Roads and Highways officials re-established the communication around 5:00pm removing earth from the road.