

Khaleda's role

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exploring block 12 through a fax in 1992. Later, during a visit to the USA, the then PM Khaleda Zia held a meeting with Occidental Petroleum. Afterwards, without any tendering process the government started an unsolicited negotiation for blocks 12, 13 and 14.

The government in July 1993 announced a petroleum policy outlining an incentive package for foreign investors in oil and gas sectors. In September that year, the government held a promotional roundtable in Houston to attract oil and gas investors. Yet, without any bid, the government in the same month started processing the unsolicited negotiation with Occidental through signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU). In November, Khaleda approved the MoU. The production sharing contracts for these blocks were signed on January 11, 1995.

The Magurjhara blowout took place in June 1997. Two government committees investigated the blowout and filed their reports by July 1997 blaming Occidental's operational negligence. Yet no move was taken to claim for the compensation until July 1, 2002 when Petrobangla made a claim of \$685 million compensation from Occidental. In response Occidental (then Unocal) said a 1998 supplemental agreement had increased 5 percent production share in favour of Bangladesh and that addressed the compensation issue. The government on

August 2005 formed a committee on the matter. That committee mysteriously refrained from filing its report.

According to another allegation, the government in 1994 awarded a three-year licence to Australian company BHP to explore Phulbari coal zone. This licence expired in 1997. But in 1998, this licence was transferred to Asia Energy and the government illegally approved it.

But Asia Energy could not use that licence to work in Bangladesh.

Khaleda, however, created the scope illegally for Asia Energy to work in Bangladesh by changing her own orders repeatedly. Later, Asia Energy was allowed to develop the Phulbari coal mine by depriving the nation of huge financial returns.

Meanwhile, Canadian company Niko Resources was awarded the unexplored gas field of Chhatak in disguise of a marginal gas field through a joint venture with Bapex.

The deal, that illegally gave away national resources worth crores of taka to Niko, was forged in connivance with the then law minister Moudud Ahmed, the then state minister for energy Moshtarak Hossain and Khaleda Zia.

Flood-hit

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USAID's acting administrator Henrietta Holman Fore.

"The devastation of the recent floods in Bangladesh demand immediate action and humanitarian relief," he said adding that over 20 million people have been displaced by the severe flooding and over US\$ 1 billion worth of damages has been inflicted on the country's infrastructure, agriculture and garment industries.

OMS to start

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Participants admitted that it would not be possible to control prices of essentials merely with the interference of law enforcers.

Replying to a question, he said businessmen will not be harassed by law enforcers. The government will concentrate more on expanding BDR market facilities for the public, instead of interfering in the traditional markets.

Earlier on Tuesday, the council of advisers discussed the market situation and directed the ministries concerned to take proper measures.

Under the OMS programme, 1.14 lakh tonnes of rice will be sanctioned to 15,000 dealers, each distributing 510kg.

The government is also planning to import 4.5 lakh tonnes of rice and 3.5 lakh tonnes of wheat before Ramadan, meeting sources said.

Five wholesale markets and 48 retail outlets of essentials will be set up in Dhaka before Ramadan under the supervision BDR. At present BDR operates 271 shops in different parts of the country.

The five wholesale markets will be established at Utara Dipu market, Gabtoli Dipjal market, Utara furniture market, Jatrabari and Kamrangir Char.

Meanwhile, BDR and Agriculture Ministry have jointly initiated a move to produce crops in different areas in cooperation with farmers. The crops will be marketed through BDR shops.

Mustakim said TCB will be activated to play a significant role to keep market prices at tolerable level. The government plans to import 500 tonnes of edible oil and 200 tonnes of grams through TCB by next month.

RMG factory

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rampage stopped at 4:30pm. Some members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) also came on a jeep around 3:15pm and left the scene shortly.

The situation finally came under control when army men intervened sometime after 4:30pm.

Two female workers told reporters that they did not get overtime of three months. Another worker of cutting section said he neither got the salary of July nor three months' overtime. He also alleged of Michael's misbehaviour with the workers.

BGMEA Director Ferdous Ahmad and Chittagong BGMEA Joint Secretary Md Mainuddin along with others went to the factory and reached a negotiation, under which the factory management will pay the workers the salary of July today.

Mainuddin said, "I do not believe that workers can go berserk like this for arrear of just one month. There might be something else behind the attack."

She said those who are creating anarchy will face action according to the constitution of the party.

Khaleda

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Some 20 JCD activists, led by RU JCD Joint Convenor Dewan Harunur Rashid Mamun, talked with Khaleda for 10 minutes from 12:15am from a house at Meherchand in the city.

Asked about activities of Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Hannan Shah, she said it does not matter what others are doing. You should stay united. "Time will say what to do".

She said those who are creating anarchy will face action according to the constitution of the party.

Flood death

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improving," said Dr Azzarul Islam, head of Short Stay Unit of ICDDR,B.

During the 1998 floods, the rate of admission of the diarrhoea patient was maximum 927 every 24 hours, he added.

Although the government set up diarrhoea units in different public medical college and hospitals to ease the pressure at ICDDR,B, a handful of patients went to those units for treatment.

Between 8:00am Tuesday and 8:00am Wednesday, some 15 patients were admitted to Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital, while only six patients were admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

As of yesterday evening, 5 diarrhoea patients were admitted to National Institute of Diseases of Chest and Hospital, 7 to Mitford Hospital and 20 to Haji Camp at Ashkona while 132 turned up from that camp.

The DGHS control room said 272 patients were transferred to public hospitals from ICDDR,B. However, the hospital sources did not agree with the DGHS control room claim.

The DGHS control room claimed that 43 diarrhoea patients had been shifted to Haji Camp diarrhoea unit. But when contacted, the Haji camp diarrhoea unit officials disagreed with the DGHS control room's claim and said that no patient was brought in the Camp from ICDDR,B yesterday evening.

"Rather, we sent a critical patient to ICDDR,B," said Maj Naufal of Haji Camp diarrhoea unit.

According to the DGHS control room, 1,309 people have been infected with respiratory diseases,

1,358 with skin diseases, 270 with eye problems, and 4,840 with various other diseases.

Meanwhile, Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said floodwater in the central and south-central districts might recede slower due to a land depression over West Bengal and adjoining areas of Bangladesh.

The overall flood situation in the country is improving and the situation is likely to improve significantly in next two days, added the FFWC.

According to flood control room of Press Information Department, till yesterday, the flood has affected over 1.6 crore people in 251 upazilas of 39 districts.

It damaged some 59,501 houses completely and 8,62,657 houses partially. Crops on 6,79,615 acres of land have been damaged completely while crops on 6,78,1388 acres of land have been damaged partially.

Furthermore, the flood damaged 2,558 km of road network completely and 21,334 km partially. A total of 510 educational institutions have been completely damaged and 6,517 educational institutions have been affected partially.

Besides, the flood damaged 79 km of embankments completely and 716 of them partially. Some 72 bridges and culverts were damaged completely while 1,536 were damaged partially.

With the latest incident of reckless driving, 22 people have died in four road accidents in last five days in Chittagong district.

Bangabandhu

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tight security.

Due to government restrictions the AL could not hold discussions, bring out mourning processions, use loud speakers to play Bangabandhu's historic speech of March 7, 1971, and display posters or placards. AL usually observes August 15 with elaborate programmes including discussions and large processions.

TIGHT SECURITY MEASURES

Tight security measures were taken from the early morning at Road 32 at Dhamondi and around Banani graveyard, setting up metal detector arches.

Police put barricades at the entrances of Road 32. A large contingent of police with water cannon and riot and prison vans were kept on alert at Road 32 and Banani graveyard.

Crowds started gathering in the morning and by noon, it stretched from Road 32 to Kalabagan, creating serious traffic congestion on Mirpur Road.

Although the government did not officially observe the day, the AL, its front organisations and different groups observed Bangabandhu's death anniversary as a national mourning day.

The day used to be officially observed as a national mourning day during the AL rule between 1996 and 2001. But the BNP-led alliance government, after coming to power in October 2001, scrapped the day's official status.

National and party flags were hoisted at the half-mast alongside black flags at all party offices across the country.

Senior leaders of AL led by acting president Zillur Rahman first placed wreaths at Bangabandhu's portrait at 8:00am, observed one minute silence and offered special prayers for the salvation of the departed soul.

Later, they went to Banani graveyard, placed floral wreaths and offered special prayers for the salvation of all the departed souls of those who were assassinated on the day in 1975 with Bangabandhu.

Talking to the reporters, Zillur demanded the government officially declare Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation and release Bangabandhu's daughter, AL President Sheikh Hasina, from internment.

Senior AL leaders including Zohora Tajuddin, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Mukul Bose, Abdul Mannan, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Akhtaruzzaman, Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed and Abdur Rahman among others placed wreaths.

Immediately after the AL central leaders placed wreaths, the party's front organisations, other political parties, social and cultural organisations also laid wreaths.

AL leaders Col (retd) Faruk Khan, Abdul Latif Siddiqui and Advocate Abdul Matin placed wreaths at the grave of Bangabandhu at Tungipara and offered fateha.

Special prayers were arranged

in mosques, churches and temples across the country. Foods were also distributed among flood victims and orphans at different orphanages.

Family members of Bangabandhu, led by Sheikh Akram Hossain, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) president Hasanul Haque Inu, Moinuddin Khan Badal, Syed Zafar Sazzad, Gono Forum leaders Engr Abdul Kashem, Mofizul Islam Khan Kamal and Mostafa Mohsin Montu also placed wreaths.

Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote offered special prayers at business office of the party chief.

Dhaka University Teachers' Association, Sammilito Sangskriti Jote, Bangladesh Bar Council, Supreme Court Lawyers' Association, Muktijoddha Parishad, Peshajibi Samannay Parishad, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, National Committee to Observe August 15, Bangabandhu Parishad, Jatiya Char Neta Parishad, Dhaka Ainjibi Samity, Jatiya Kabita Parishad, Bharat-Bangladesh Sanghati Parishad, Muktijoddha Sanghati Parishad, Mohila Muktijoddha Sanghat, Muktijoddha Paribar Kalyan Sangsads, Muktijoddha Projammo, 75-er Ghatak Dalai Nirmul Committee, BAKSAL, Projanno 71, Awami Ainjibi Parishad, Bangabandhu Ainjibi Parishad, Shaheed Noor Hossain Sangshad, Sheikh Hasina Mukti Parishad, Dhaka Sarok Poribahan Samity, Khelaghara and many other organisations placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu.

The sit-in will hinder payment of other financial benefits to the retrenched workers, which is scheduled to start next Sunday.

Payment of cheques against arrear wages of 15 weeks of remaining 332 retrenched workers could not be continued yesterday due to the protest.

The BJMC paid about Tk 4.90 crore until Tuesday.

Crowley

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Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry.

Out of the government's target to disburse Tk 7,698.34 crore as agri-loan for post-flood agriculture rehabilitation, the BKB alone will disburse Tk 3,550 crore.

The bank has re-fixed its target of disbursing crop production loans at Tk 1,800 crore instead of Tk 1,500 crore.

The BKB has started activities through its 948 branches across the country and formed a special monitoring cell to ensure smooth loan disbursement.

The Krishi Bank has also decided to reschedule the loans of flood-affected farmers for one year. The bank will also give fresh loans to the farmers.

Sources said the BKB raised the interest rate on agri-loans as part of reform programmes prescribed by the World Bank, but the bank said it made the increase to reduce its loss.

Meanwhile, the finance ministry has suspended the proposal of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank for increasing the interest rate on agriculture loans.

4 suicide bombings

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from the compound of the state oil marketing company in Baghdad on Tuesday, an official said.

"A gang of armed men dressed in Iraqi security uniforms broke into the compound of the State Oil Marketing Organisation and kidnapped several people, including Deputy Oil Minister Waga," oil ministry spokesman Asim Jihad said.

Jihad said the daylight raid on the company's compound, which also houses residential quarters for its employees took place soon after the closing of the offices.

Elsewhere, a US transport helicopter crashed near an air base in western Iraq, killing five troopers, the military said. The CH-47 Chinook helicopter was conducting a routine post-maintenance test flight when it went down near Taqaddum air base, the US military said.

Four other US soldiers were reported killed in combat in an explosion near their vehicle Monday in the northwestern Nineveh province. The fourth died of wounds suffered in western Baghdad.

The deaths raised to at least 3,700 the number of US military personnel who have died since the Iraq war started in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

Baghdad was spared major violence in another sign that a six-month-old security crackdown in the capital is disrupting extremists' fire-power. But the brazen daylight raid on the Oil Ministry complex showed that armed gangs can still embarrass authorities.

Dozens of gunmen wearing security force uniforms stormed the compound and abducted a deputy oil minister and four other officials who were spirited away in a convoy of military-style vehicles.

The kidnappers similar to a commando-like raid on Iraq's Finance Ministry in May included Abdal-Jabar al-Waga, a senior assistant to Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani, told Associated Press.

Al-Waga and four other officials with the State Oil Marketing Organisation were taken away by more than 50 gunmen in military-style vehicles, said an Interior Minister official, speaking anonymously because he was not authorised to release the information. Five bodyguards were wounded in the raid, the official said.

On May 29, five Britons were seized in a similar raid on Iraq's Finance Ministry. They were taken by gunmen wearing police uniforms and have not been found.

Both government organisations are near Sadr City, a stronghold of the Mahdi Army militia loyal to radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

The raids were reminiscent of an attack by Mahdi Army fighters, dressed as Interior Ministry commandos, who stormed a Higher Education Ministry office Nov. 14 and carried off as many as 200 people. Dozens of those kidnap victims were never found.

Just north of the capital, a suicide truck bomber devastated a key bridge on the highway linking Baghdad with Mosul. Police said at least 10 people died. The Thiraa Dijla bridge in Taji, near a US air base 12 miles north of the capital also was bombed three months ago, leaving only one lane open.

The violence punctuated a day when 16,000 US and Iraqi soldiers began a sweep through the Diyala River valley in a new operation north of Baghdad in pursuit of Sunni insurgents and Shia militiamen driven out of Baquba and Anbar provinces over the past several weeks.

Lt Col Michael Donnelly, a military spokesman in northern Iraq, said the force included 10,000 Americans and 6,000 Iraqis. He said US aircraft used more than 30,000 pounds of munitions to block routes and destroy known and suspected heavy machine gun positions.

The Air Force also dropped 9,000 pounds of bombs to attack an al-Qaeda in Iraq training camp, which included bunkers, living quarters, weapons and ammunition caches, Donnelly said.

Three suspected militants had been killed and four booby-trapped houses destroyed, he said, citing preliminary reports.

In Washington, Defence Department spokesman Bryan Whitman said the new operation was one in a series planned over the next 30 days to try to blunt expected attempts by al-Qaeda in Iraq to influence events during "this critical period" as the top US commander in Iraq, Gen David Petraeus, plans his assessment for Congress.