

Asia Pacific intelligence chiefs talk terror, piracy in Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Top military intelligence chiefs from 19 nations gathered here Wednesday for the first time to discuss terrorism, maritime security and disaster relief.

"This is an opportunity for the intelligence chiefs from all these countries to get together to talk about areas of mutual cooperation and how we can go about sharing information for the benefit of all," said Major General Mohamed Salleh Ismail, Malaysia's Director General of Defence Intelligence.

"Having to combat these invisible enemies, it becomes crucial for us to cooperate and share intelligence to counter them. Combat readiness to address any security threats requires accurate and reliable intelligence of the enemy," he told AFP.

The first Asia Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference -- conceived and organised by Malaysian and the United States -- is chaired by Lieutenant General Michael Maples, director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency.

The chief of Malaysia's armed forces, General Abdul Aziz Zainal, said in opening remarks that threats from "alienated individuals and militant organisations" were "the new challenges confronting the 21st century."

Mohamed Salleh called for better cooperation to strengthen security in the Malacca Strait, through which 30 percent of world trade and half of the world's energy supply passes.

He also said that lessons learned during the 2004 tsunami, where the military played a crucial role in providing aid, indicated a need for better information systems to better handle humanitarian crises and disaster relief.

Attending the three-day talks are representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Britain, Brunei, Cambodia, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam.

Organisers said China was invited but opted out at the last minute without giving any reason.



Former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad along with party leaders coming out of the court as the verdict of the gold smuggling case was adjourned for the seventh time yesterday. (Story on Page 20)



Potholes on Badda-Gulshan Link Road in the city have been causing immense suffering to commuters, but the authorities have turned a blind eye to the problem. The picture was taken yesterday.

Gas continues to burn at Titas field

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a possible disaster, the villagers claimed.

They claimed the BGFCL authorities are busy with repairing their gas-wells. The authorities have not told the villagers yet what steps they are going to take to stop the gas emissions.

The holes are gradually becoming wider while a number of them have already been sealed with mud and water from the fields, which are now under stagnant rainwater. The villagers claim gas is coming out in big bubbles from water bodies and farmlands, which are under water.

During The Daily Star correspondent's visit to the area, gas was discharging in large bubbles at some spots while at a number of others places smaller gas-bubbles were coming out of the water.

Gas is gushing out through pipes of all five tube-wells of the villages. The water of these tube-wells is warm, smelling of gas and has traces of oil. The villagers are having difficulty in finding drinking water.

Sayed Hossain of Shyampur dismantled his tube-well a year ago because it was discharging gas into the air. He filled the spot of the tube-well with soil. Now the heap remains hot all the time. The villagers fear an explosion may occur at the spot.

The villagers said all the tube-wells in the six square kilometre area of Shyampur and Anandapur villages are useless and installation of new wells failed.

When villagers tried to install pipes for tube-wells to a depth of around 500 feet gas along with water starts gushing out. They tried drilling holes at different spots and depth without success. Finding no other alternatives, the villagers are now using unsafe water.

Since all the tube-wells of the villages are emitting natural gas, it sometimes starts to burn coming in contact with open flames, kerosene lanterns or earthen stoves. The villagers said they cannot use fire openly anywhere.

District administration advised the villagers over loudspeakers not to use kerosene lamps, not to light matches and to use flashlights in the area.

According to deputy commissioner's (DC) office sources, following instructions from a ministry concerned, a five-member Social Survey Committee headed by additional deputy commissioner (ADC-general) surveyed the area and collected information about families and their properties and made a list.

The list will be used if people of that area had to be compensated, DC office sources said. The sources also said the DC office took the initiatives to prepare itself if a disaster occurred so that it could help the real victims if required.

However, the authorities of BGFCL informed the DC office that a large-scale disaster is very unlikely from the gushing out of natural gas at Shyampur and Anandapur villages near the Location-3 of Brahmanbaria Titas Gas Field.

The villagers claimed the pressure of gas is not falling. The BGFCL authorities, however, claimed emission of gas remains stable and there is no danger.

When contacted, recently appointed Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Brahmanbaria Md Abdul Hai said he would look into relevant files and take urgent steps in this regard.

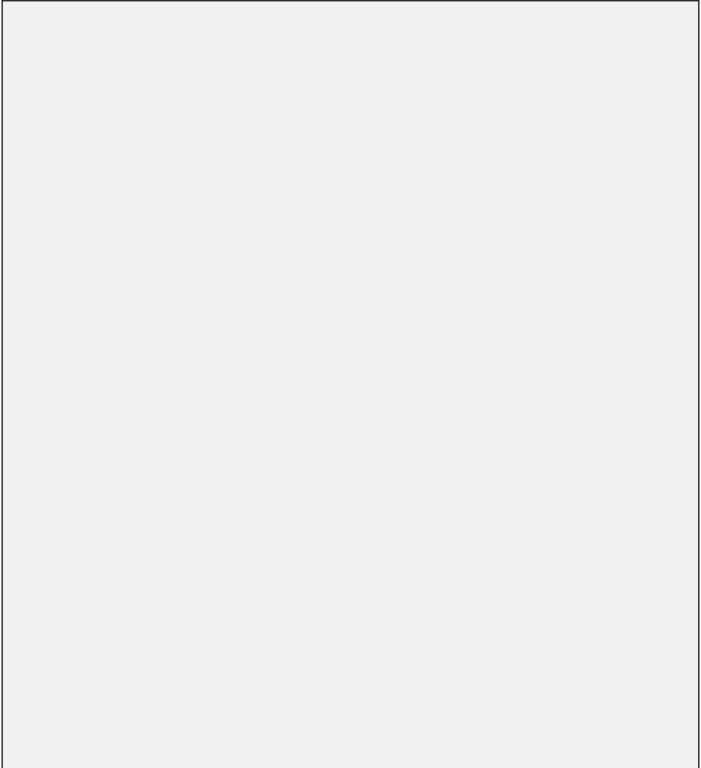
The villagers had informed the BGFCL authorities about their problems three years ago. The BGFCL authorities told them the gas was emitting from a pocket and it was not harmful.

Surprisingly, the BGFCL at a press conference later on speculated that the gas emitting from

Shyampur and Anandapur could be from gas-well-3 or 10 as the three matched in quality. The state-owned Petrobangla formed a six-member probe committee to investigate the issue and it submitted its report on February 11.

The report suggested immediate remedial work after faults are identified by "logging work" of the wells in Location-3 and an examination of underground layer for which subsidence might have occurred.

Bapex, a local gas exploring company, was selected to do the repair works. The engineers of



Bapex and Petrobangla selected gas-well-3, an old well of Titas Gas Field, to repair it first, sources said.

When they tried to kill the well it showed abnormal signs. It was saved from a blowout by burning huge amount of gas in the air.

The authorities concerned called in Bob Grace, a gas-well blowout specialist, for his input in this regard. Grace suggested that efforts should be concentrated on gas-well-3 and if the gas emission at Shyampur and Anandapur were related, the problems

