

Strengthen Bapex for exploring gas, coal

Experts urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts, academicians, cultural activists and politicians at a roundtable yesterday said the government should strengthen local companies for exploring the country's gas and coal resources for energy security instead of handing over the natural resources to foreign companies.

Termining Bapex (Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company) an efficient company like foreign ones, they also said the government should provide Bapex with proper facilities and give the onus of exploring gas from the potential fields.

Sammilito Sanskritik Jote (SSI) organised the roundtable on 'Energy Policy of Bangladesh and Exploration of Oil and Gas' at the National Press Club in the city.

Prof Badrul Imam of Geology Department at Dhaka University presented the keynote paper at the roundtable.

He said to face the energy crisis, there is no alternative of emphasising on developing gas and coal extraction programmes.

"Dependence on foreign companies in gas exploration is increasing day by day. In 2004, 24 per cent of the whole gas extraction

was done by foreign companies, while it increased to 50 per cent in 2008. If the local companies are not given proper facilities, the dependence will further increase," said Prof Badrul.

He said the government was reluctant to strengthen Bapex financially, giving an instance that the government buys gas from Bapex at Tk 7 per unit of gas while the same amount was bought from the foreign companies at Tk 200.

Prof Badrul urged the caretaker government to increase finance, manpower and facilities for Bapex officials and employees and engage it in exploring and extracting gas from the fields and also those that were left by the foreign companies.

He also urged the caretaker government to approve the draft coal policy and asked the government not to sign any deal with foreign companies, saying let an elected government do it.

Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed said, "Taking decision about natural resources should be left for the elected governments as they are people's representatives."

"Though our own company

Bapex is an efficient one, it has been kept virtually inactive," he said.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said, "Any policy regarding energy should be consistent with the national interest."

The efficiency of Bapex is the most among the companies operating in the company so the local company should be given the priority of exploring gas instead of the foreign companies, he added.

Pointing to the special assistant (in-charge of the energy ministry) to the chief adviser (CA), Selim said he was doing every thing to serve the interest of the foreign companies.

"He (special assistant to CA) advocated for exporting gas a few years back, saying we have more gas than we need and there will be no one to buy gas if Bangladesh does not export gas now. He did that for the interest of the westerners and now he is trying to give the Phulbari coalmine to Asia Energy."

DU Prof Aftab Alam Khan, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, SSI President Nasiruddin Yusuf and General Secretary Golam Kuddus and Cultural activist Mamun-ur-Rashid also spoke.

Prince Aga Khan arrives May 19

UNB, Dhaka

Prince Aga Khan, Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, will arrive in the city on May 19 on a four-day state visit to Bangladesh.

His visit marks the golden jubilee of his Imamate. Prince Aga Khan became the Imam on July 11, 1957.

Habib Hiri, president of the Aga Khan National Council, told reporters at a local hotel that during his stay, Prince Aga Khan will call on the president and the chief adviser and hold meetings with several advisers.

Prince Aga Khan will lay the foundation of the Aga Khan Academy at Basundhara and a permanent Jamat Khana of the community.

The Aga Khan Academy was built on 21 acres of land at a cost of around US\$ 50 million to teach brilliant students from the primary to the secondary level, and impart training to teachers.

An official of the Aga Khan Foundation said some 750 to 1200 Bangladeshi students will be admitted to the Academy on the basis of merit. The medium of teaching will be both Bangla and English.

Shop owners protest theft in city market

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shop owners of the city's Eastern Plus market complex at Shantinagar yesterday took to the street for around two hours protesting the theft of mobile sets breaking shutters of two shops on Tuesday night.

Shop owners and employees in hundreds came down on the streets in front of the market complex and staged demonstration protesting the incident.

The demonstrating shop owners said mobile sets worth around Tk 10 lakh and Tk 14,000 in cash were taken away breaking the shutters of two shops on the 4th floor of the building sometimes during the night.

Mahmud Hasan, owner of MR Telecom, filed a case with Paltan Police Station alleging that a total of 43 mobile sets worth Tk 7.0 lakh and Tk 14,000 in cash were stolen from his shop.

B. B. Raitan, police said, no arrested, was made in this connection.



Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed and Agriculture Adviser CS Karim visit a stall of potato-made items at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday. (Story on Star Business, B3)

HATIRJHEEL PROJECT

'Cancel design to save 500 families'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Boro Maghbazar, Siddeshwari and Ulon moujas yesterday demanded cancellation of the current design of the Hatirjheel project, as about 400-500 families of these moujas will be homeless if the project is implemented with the current design.

They urged the government to implement the much-awaited project with the previous design for the sake of their lives.

"About 400-500 families will be homeless if the Hatirjheel project is implemented with the new design as the border of the project has been changed in the new design," said Master MA Hamid, a resident of Nayatola in Boro Maghbazar area, at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the city.

In a written statement, he said, "We also want the implementation of the Hatirjheel project and the government will save hundreds of families

from being homeless if the project is implemented with the previous design."

"We have been living here paying all the government taxes, but our existence is now at stake," he added.

"The activities to acquire pucca, semi-pucca houses and buildings in the areas by extending about 800-900-feet lands in the south from the main canal will cause a huge damage to our lives as hundreds of families from middle and lower-middle class groups will be evicted," he said.

Engineer Wahed Khan, also a resident of the area, said, "About 450 pucca and semi-pucca houses and seven Rajuk-approved multi-storied buildings will be demolished if the new design is implemented. What will be our fate if these buildings were demolished?"

Showing a map, he said, "Although we have not received any letter of acquiring our houses till date, we have got this map of the new design that shows houses of the three moujas are also included in it."

Besides, it was also hung in the Army Camp at the project site and Rajuk, he said.

People of Hatirjheel project are also measuring lands in our areas and some even are saying the project will be extended further, he said. "We contacted many people, including Rajuk and project people but none gave any information," he added.

Abdur Razzak, also a resident of the area, alleged that about 80 bighas of lands have been extended in the new design in a planned way whereas some areas have been excluded in the new design.

A vested quarter is conspiring to foil the project, he said.

They urged the government to implement the project with the previous design to save hundreds of families from being homeless.

Abdul Awal, Khandaker Aminul Islam, Abu Sufian and many other residents of the three moujas were also present at the press conference.

7th Wage Board chairman submits report to chief adviser

UNB, Dhaka

The Seventh Newspaper Wage Board yesterday submitted its report to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed recommending new scales of salary, allowances and other welfare measures for journalists and press workers and employees of the newspapers and news agencies.

Chairman of the wage board Justice Habibur Rahman Khan handed over the recommendation report to Fakhruddin at the CA's office.

The government in a notification formed the Seventh Wage Board on February 26, 2008, giving it two months time to prepare recommendations. The board accomplished its task of recommending the wage board award within the fixed timeframe.

"The seventh wage board's recommendations removed the existing anomalies in salary and allowances, and conditions of employment of journalists, employees and press workers," said an official source.

All members of the 10-member wage board, including representatives of newspaper owners, journalists and press employees, had attended all its meetings.

Information Secretary Zamil Osman, CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim and Secretary to the seventh wage board Khurshid Alam were present during the submission of the report.

Apollo Hospitals gets blood bank licence

Apollo Hospitals Dhaka received Blood Bank Licence from the Directorate of Health recently, says a press release.

Under this licence, Apollo Hospitals Dhaka will be entitled to blood collection, processing, various testing, preparation/separation of blood component, storage, preservation, sale & distribution of whole blood & blood component.



Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed speaks at a roundtable at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his left is Mujahidul Islam Selim and on his right are Prof Badrul Imam, Nasiruddin Yusuf and Golam Kuddus.

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