

Iraq resumes oil exploration after 20-year break

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq said on Friday it was resuming exploration of its immense oil reserves after a break of nearly 20 years due to crippling UN sanctions, saying it hopes to double its proven deposits of crude.

"Today the Iraqi oil ministry celebrates a return to work by Iraqi oil exploration teams after 20 years of interruption," ministry spokesman Assim Jihad told AFP.

Oil Minister Hussein Hussein al-Shahrastani was to attend a ceremony to mark the event at the Al-Garraf field near Nasiriyah, 350 km south of Baghdad, Jihad said.

He said the ministry would deploy three exploration teams trained abroad in the latest techniques.

Opec member Iraq hopes the squads will uncover deposits that will enable it to double its proven oil reserves, currently standing at 115 billion barrels of crude.

After the regime of now executed dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the United Nations imposed a strict oil embargo on Iraq, forcing it to cease exploration and cut back drastically on exports.

A UN "oil-for-food" programme between 1996 and 2003 allowed Baghdad to sell oil in exchange for humanitarian goods it lacked because of the sanctions.

However Saddam's government allegedly embezzled millions of dollars from the scheme, sparking a scandal that caused major embarrassment to the United Nations.

Iraq now wants to ramp up output by 500,000 barrels per day

(bpd) from the current average production of 2.5 million bpd, about equal to the amount being pumped before the US-led invasion of March 2003.

Exports of 2.1 million bpd currently form the bulk of the war-torn nation's revenues, and the oil ministry is keen to raise capacity over the next five years to 4.5 million bpd.

On Tuesday, a US government report said Iraq was amassing a huge budget surplus of soaring oil export revenues but spending little on reconstruction, leaving the financial burden on the United States.

Counting Baghdad's actual budget balance for 2005 to 2007, and the projected budget of 2008, Iraq would have amassed a surplus of up to 79.3 billion dollars on the back of high prices, the Government Accounting Office said.

But little of that money is going toward maintaining and rebuilding key civil infrastructure, it said.

The report said Iraq's capital spending has been hampered by the lack of trained personnel, weak budgeting and procurement processes, and ongoing violence across the country.

At the end of June, the oil ministry threw open six oilfields and two gas fields for international bidding by 41 companies, the contracts for which are expected to be signed in June next year.

The deals, which are service contracts only, pave the way for energy firms based abroad to return to Iraq 36 years after Saddam threw them out.

Poll: Understanding

FROM PAGE 1 Eminent lawyer Shahdin Malik said legally a state of emergency means restrictions on freedom of movement, expressions and assembly. "Polls cannot be held freely and fairly if these rights are restricted."

About the political parties' demand for lifting the emergency, the legal expert said, "The demand should prevail over the government's stance, as it is neither against the constitution nor illegal."

Soon after the local government polls of August 4, the chief election commissioner and some advisers to the caretaker government hinted that the national election the government had promised to hold in the third week of December this year, will be held under the state of emergency.

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal made it clear on Thursday that the parliamentary election, the final step towards switching to democracy, will surely be held under the state of emergency.

But top leaders of major political parties have been putting pressure on the government to lift the

emergency, saying the election will not be free, fair and neutral with political rights restricted.

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina who is currently in the US for treatment, already instructed her party not to take part in the parliamentary poll if held under an emergency.

"With instruction from Sheikh Hasina, I'm saying that Awami League will not take part in the elections under the emergency," Acting AL President Zillur Rahman told reporters after a meeting with party leaders yesterday.

The European Union in the meantime announced that it will not send observers if the national poll is held amid an emergency. The government however urged the union to reconsider, while different foreign diplomats also echoed the view of the political parties.

Fakhruddin Ahmed-led interim government imposed the state of emergency in the country in early January of last year against a backdrop of days of political violence over holding the ninth parliamentary election.

Greatest show

FROM PAGE 1 three gold medals at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

A three and a half hour opening ceremony, directed by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Zhang Yimou, featured 5,000 competitors from 204 nations parade in a lavish event, with 35,000 fireworks lighting up a typical, smog-filled Beijing evening.

A tightly-choreographed hour-long sector, shot through with themes from Zhang's signature movies Hero and House of Flying Daggers, portrayed China's colourful history from ancient dynasties to 21st century power.

In a country where eight is a lucky number, the ceremony burst into life at eight minutes past eight on the eighth day of the eighth month.

Organisers would welcome a dose of good fortune after seeing the build-up to the Games, planned as the crowning achievement of the country's breathless economic transformation, often overshadowed by disputes over human rights, press freedom and unease in the West over Chinese foreign policy.

As tradition demands, Greece, the home of the ancient Olympics, led the parade of teams into the stadium with judoka Ilias Iliadis carrying his country's flag.

But in a break from that famous tradition, the competing nations then filed through in the order based on the number of strokes of their names as written in Chinese characters.

China, with a 639-strong squad, brought up the rear led by flag bearer, and basketball superstar, Yao Ming unleashing a huge roar from the crowd.

Taiwan, classed as a breakaway province by China's Communist rulers, were given a rapturous welcome when their 24 competi-

tors filed through with Iraq's five-strong delegation also attracting warm, sympathetic applause.

The United Arab Emirates were led by Sheikhha Maitha al-Maktoum, the first woman to lead a Gulf nation at the Games.

Disabled swimmer Natalie du Toit, making history as the first athlete to compete against able-bodied competitors at an Olympics, led the way for South Africa.

The United States were led in by Sudan-born Lopez Lomong, a former refugee from Darfur, in a politically-charged choice given the criticism of Chinese foreign policy over the conflict in the African region.

South and North Korea, who failed to agree on marching in side-by-side, entered separated by three other nations.

Tennis legend Roger Federer led the Swiss in on his 27th birthday. Many heads of state attended the opening ceremony.

They included US President George W. Bush and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak.

Before arriving in Beijing, Bush repeatedly highlighted during a speech in Thailand Washington's "deep concerns" over religious freedom and human rights in China.

More than 100,000 security personnel have been called in to police the Games, amid fresh warnings of terror attacks from Islamic separatists while Beijing airport was also shut down just ahead of the start of the ceremony.

The streets were unusually quiet as many of the Chinese capital's 17 million residents stayed at home after the city government declared a public holiday.

Delhi to further open up trade with Dhaka

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday announced that it would further open up trade with least developed countries (LDCs), including Bangladesh, in South Asia under Safta by reducing to 480 the sensitive items list that will remain outside the concessional trade in the region.

The decision to prune the sensitive items list for LDCs from 744 was taken by the cabinet at its meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal said the go to fuverment also gave its approval for deleting the roadmap for tariff reductions in respect of the 264 items from the sensitive list.

"This is in pursuance of India's announcement during the 14th Saarc Summit (in Delhi in March last year) regarding its readiness to accept asymmetrical responsibilities, including opening her markets to South Asian neighbours without insisting on reciprocity," Sibal said.

LDCs in the Saarc region are Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

US military trial jails Laden driver for only 5 & half yr

AP, Guantanamo Bay Naval Base

A US military jury gave Osama bin Laden's driver a surprisingly light sentence on Thursday, making him eligible for release in just five months despite the prosecutors' request for at least a 30-year sentence to deter would-be terrorists.

Salim Hamdan's sentence of 5 and a half years, including five years and a month already served at Guantanamo Bay, fell far short of the sentence he could have gotten for aiding terrorism by driving and guarding bin Laden. It now goes for mandatory review to a Pentagon official who can shorten the sentence but not extend it.

It remains unclear what will happen to Hamdan once his sentence is served, since the US military has said it won't release anyone who still represents a threat. The judge, Navy Capt. Keith Alford, said Hamdan, who is from Yemen, would likely be eligible for the same administrative review process as other Guantanamo prisoners.

Defence lawyers said they expect Hamdan will be let go in five months. "It was all for show if Mr. Hamdan does not go home in December," said Charles Swift, one of Hamdan's civilian attorneys.

Hamdan thanked the jurors for the sentence and repeated his apology for having served bin Laden. "I would like to apologize one more time to all the members and I would like to thank you for what you have done for me," Hamdan told the five-man, one-woman jury, all military officers hand-picked by the Pentagon for the first US war crimes trial in a half-century.

Hamdan was found guilty of supporting terrorism by serving as bin Laden's armed bodyguard and driver while knowing the al-Qaeda leader was plotting US attacks. But he was found not guilty of providing missiles to al-Qaeda and knowing his work would be used for terrorism. He also was cleared of being part of al-Qaeda's conspiracy to attack the United States the most serious charges he faced.

The military has not said where Hamdan will serve his sentence, but the commander of the detention centre, Navy Rear Adm. David Thomas, said last week that convicted prisoners will be held apart from the general detainee population at the isolated US military base in southeast Cuba.

"I hope the day comes that you return to your wife and daughters and your country, and you're able to be a provider, a father and a husband in the best sense of all those terms," the judge told Hamdan.

Ever since, the mine has barely producing coal. Mining remained totally suspended between October 2006 and April 2007 as the CMC refused to work demanding various payments, including one instalment of the Supplier's Credit taken by Bangladesh. The suspension also affected power generation by the 250 megawatt Barapukuria plant.

In May last year, the mining operation however got a new lease of life as the government emphasised improving performance. This resulted in an increase of daily coal production and repeated attempts to recover equipment from the sealed off site.

The mine's daily coal production jumped to 3,000 tonnes this year from less than 1,400 tonnes in 2005-06. The increased production rate will help the BCMCL achieve its annual target for the first time -- this year's being 800,000 tonnes. It will greatly reduce coal production cost this year, said an official.

"With the recovered set of equipment, we will now have a continuity of coal production. We will be able to surpass the one million tonne production target from next year," he added.

The BCMCL loses 45 days of coal production if it uses just one set of equipment. This is because the miners install the equipment in one particular 'coal face', produce certain quantity of coal and then mobilise the equipment in a new coal face to begin fresh production. With two sets, the miners waste no

"I take it as a overwhelming people's desire that parliament should function properly, which is the most important body in the country representing the people as a whole," he added.

Asked why he had not thought of resigning from the party when he became Lok Sabha Speaker, Chatterjee said it was not the convention then.

"I consciously decided not to take part in any affairs of the party. Sitting on the chair I never espoused any cause," Chatterjee noted.

He said there should be a convention for the Speaker to "temporarily" resign from the party for his tenure.

"Modestly I proclaim that I have conspicuously never done anything to support a, b or c," he said adding that sometimes members of his former party had been upset over that. "If I have succeeded, it is for history to judge," Chatterjee said.

Hatirjheel roads

FROM PAGE 1

An official of the Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) said pipes would be set up along the roads to carry off the industrial waste to a treatment plant planned to be built at Beriath.

Mujibur said planning and designing of the Wasa sewers systems for Hatirjheel-Begunbari are nearing completion and the field level work will begin in the next dry season.

A survey to assess the cost of acquiring land and structures for the project has been in full swing and is likely to be completed this month, said an official of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk).

Sources said over 300 acres of land would have to be reclaimed to implement the project. Of that, 129 acres are private land. Rajuk has already demolished a good number of illegal structures. But BGMEA Bhaban and a CNG filling station opposite FDC, and 150 more structures on the west of Rampura Bridge are still out of the purview of demolition drive due to legal complications, said the official.

Furore against Delwar

FROM PAGE 1

"BNP leaders could have won the elections in at least three cities, had Delwar refrained himself from making confusing statements through the media," a leader of the party said requesting anonymity.

According to the BNP insiders, the party could not even officially endorse the demand for Khaleda's release, as the secretary general failed to hold any meeting of the party's standing committee or the central executive committee since his appointment on September 3 last year.

Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah, an adviser to the chairperson, already raised questions regarding Delwar's failure to hold decision making meetings, saying executive committee meetings must be held for running the party.

Hannan had been Delwar's comrade in arms in the faction loyal to Khaleda, until their recent falling out.

The party insiders also said there is a debate raging in the party over Delwar's unilateral decision to boycott the August 4 local government elections, as most of the leaders and supporters believe the decision was wrong.

"Boycotting the August 4 elections was not a party decision, the party officially did not even discuss the matter. But using the name of the party Delwar imposed his personal decision on the party. That's why we've lost Barisal, Khulna and Rajshahi city corporations," a former lawmaker of BNP told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said, "Confusing statements made by Delwar before the elections played a major role in the party leaders' defeat."

\$10m equipment

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along with the equipment due to a sudden rise of carbon monoxide. This gas can cause instant death and is a result of spontaneous combustion of the high grade coal at Barapukuria.

Mining sources said the disaster happened because the Chinese contractor CMC had left highly inflammable coal pits exposed to air since May 2005 and the mining authorities overlooked the matter. Mining norms dictate that coal pits should not be left exposed to air for more than 24 hours as this can lead to self-combustion of coal and emission of gas.

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Mujibur Rahman said as the BGMEA Bhaban stands in the middle of the canal, it will obstruct the flow of stormwater.

"It will also reduce the canal's capacity of water retention," he observed.

Housing and Public Works Secretary ASM Rashidul Hai said he does not know whether the building will be knocked down or not. He said he also does not know anything about when the government will decide on the matter.

The executive committee of the National Economic Council approved the project on October 8 last year. Of the cost, the government will finance Tk 1,323 crore while the rest is expected from the Japan Development Cooperation Fund.

Of the amount, Tk 101 crore will be used for land acquisition, Tk 40.80 crore for construction of storm sewerage lines, Tk 18 crore for pipe drains, Tk 55 crore for the roads, Tk 20.58 crore for silt disposal and Tk 51 crore will be spent on beautification up to Rampura Bridge.

The party's expelled secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who is also a key leader of the faction that has been the rival of Khaleda loyalists, told reporters yesterday, "It's true that there were reasons for taking such a decision [boycotting the elections]. But participation in the elections could also be a part of a movement."

Alleging that Delwar is now busy ensuring his control over the party leadership, a pro-Hannan leader said, "He is not interested in reuniting the party or taking decisions through discussions in party forums, because he is afraid of possible strong opposition from party leaders."

Ruling out the allegation however, a former lawmaker close to Delwar said the secretary general is overseeing party affairs according to directions given by the detained party chairperson.

Meanwhile, party insiders hinted that Hannan Shah, who is currently undergoing treatment in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), is also trying to mediate a process for the detained chairperson's release.

The sources said during his stay in BSMMU, Hannan might discuss party matters including the matter of the chairperson's release with detained Senior Joint Secretary General Tanique Rahman, who is also undergoing treatment in that hospital.

If needed, the possibility of bringing Khaleda Zia to BSMMU soon is also there, for making a breakthrough in the negotiations regarding the detained chairperson's release, a BNP leader hinted yesterday while talking to The Daily Star.

Indigenous

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Law and Land Adviser AF Hassan Ariff will attend a discussion as the chief guest in the afternoon, said a press release.

BIPF President Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, popularly known as Santu Larma, other indigenous leaders, intellectuals, educationists and politicians are expected to attend the discussion.

Besides, the BIPF has organised screening of documentary films, photography exhibitions on indigenous people, rallies and discussions in the capital.

Our Rangamati correspondent reported that local NGOs in Chittagong Hill Tracts have also chalked out elaborate programmes to mark the day with the theme "Indigenous People's Economic and Social Rights."

Our correspondent from Mymensingh reported that tribal leaders at a press conference at the Mymensingh Press Club yesterday demanded that the government observe the day at national level and recognise the rights of indigenous people.

The indigenous people are deprived of the economic, social and political rights enjoyed by other citizens in the country, said former lawmaker and Tribal Welfare Association (TWA) President advocate Promod Mankin at a press conference organised by the TWA, Garo Chhatra Association and Garo Chhatra Union.

The organisations will hold programmes to be inaugurated by Bishop Ponen Paul Kubi at a local gymnasium.

A correspondent from Chapainawabganj adds: The World Indigenous People's Day Observation committee in Chapainawabganj at a press conference at the Town Club demanded that the government meet the demands of the indigenous people.

The indigenous leaders said more government attention is required in order to ensure the rights and socio-economic development of the indigenous people.

CHT commission

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other team led by Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission Co-chairman Sultana Kamal visited Duitilla and Charmail areas in Baghaichhari. Both teams talked to indigenous people, settlers and government officials in the areas.

The indigenous people told the commission that the settlers are grabbing their lands, orchards and properties at Duitilla, Charmail, Bagaihat and Sajek under the protection of the administration. The settlers harass their young daughters everywhere, they alleged. They also demanded withdrawal of security forces from CHT. Indigenous leaders said they want a peaceful environment.

The settlers, however, told the commission that the indigenous people were grabbing their land which the government provided them at Karallachhari in Mohalchhari upazila, Duitilla, Charmail and Bagaihat in Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati. The settlers said criminal activists have risen in the hilly areas and JSS and UPDF are responsible for many instances of abduction, killing and extortion. They demanded the presence of more security personnel in their areas.

The commission would officially disclose its findings in a press conference which will be held in Dhaka within the next two weeks.

Lord Avebury went to Khagrachhari Thursday and held discussions with regional commander Brig Gen Kamruzzaman PSC, Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Shahadat Hossen, Khagrachhari Hill District Council (KHDC) Chairman Monindra Lal Tripura and CHT Taskforce Chairman Samiron Dewan.

Victoria Tauli Corpus from the Philippines, Sara Hossain, Shapan Adnan, M Zafar Iqbal, Tom Eskildsen, representative of Juma Net Japan, and Chris Erni, representative of IWGIA, were among the teams.

Automation

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sector) that is helping the customs authorities to introduce the new system.

It will help complete all customs formalities in only six steps against about 42 steps one had to go through under the previous system, he said.

The introduction of full automation and user-friendly procedures will help Chittagong Customs House check the evasion of revenue of at least Tk 350 crore and double the revenue earnings which now stands at Tk 11,000 crore a year, said a report of the taskforce.

It will also reduce business expenditure by 40 to 50 percent and save time by 80 percent in terms of completing customs procedures, claimed the report.

Taskforce B Commander Brig Gen Hasan Nasir, Customs Commissioners Shah Alam Khan and Margub Ahmed, CCCI Director Amirul Haq, and BGMEA First Vice-President MA Salam were present at the launching programme.

Grassroots for polls

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know what they think about the local polls. We will seek everyone's opinion in phases."

He said the final decision on the issue will be taken in coordination with AL.

District leaders of AL meantime are confused about what would be their role if upazila-level leaders go to the polls. They are waiting for the central committee's instructions in this regard, said insiders.

AL Central Working Committee at its last meeting on July 30 did not take any decision regarding the local polls. Instead, it decided to act according to how things develop. However, the party would keep trying to persuade the government and the Election Commission (EC) to hold the national election first.

"We have preparations for the polls, and at the same time we are ready to resist the elections if the party wants," Asgar Ali, general secretary of Kushtia district AL, told The Daily Star.

AL yesterday said it is the constitutional obligation of the caretaker administration to hold the general election before everything else.

Addressing a discussion in the city, AL presidium member Abdur Razzak urged the government and EC to scrap the plans for upazila polls in October, and said their

Bodies of 3

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them but could not find them all night. Rabiul informed Kumarkhali Police Station next morning and police recorded a general diary (GD).

Around 1:20pm locals discovered the body of Sumala in the pond adjacent to Rabiul's home. Later, bodies of Kamala and Kawsar were also recovered there.

Superintendent of Police of Kushtia Mosleh Uddin went to the spot and told journalists it could be a case of suicide. Kamala's family sources claimed Rabiul and Kamala were a happy couple.

Five-year-old Rubaia, a daughter of the couple, drowned in the same pond seven years ago. Sabbir, 8, cousin of Rabiul, also drowned in the pond 10 years ago.

Lentils: Poor people

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and Tk 95 a kg, according to yesterday's report of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

According to yesterday's market prices, Mung dal and Mashkalai dal were selling at Tk 75 and chickpeas at Tk 70 a kg.

Apart from the high level of protein, lentils also contain dietary fibre, vitamin B1 and minerals. Health magazines of the world have placed lentils as one of the five healthiest foods, according to Wikipedia.org.

"Those who cannot afford adequate fish, meat or eggs, lentils of various kinds can be the number one source of first class protein for them. But the ratio of lentils and wheat or rice is very important," said Prof Abdul Malek of Nutrition and Food Science Institute of Dhaka University.

Rice and wheat only have six and 12 percent protein, lentils have 24 percent protein. "Therefore, when you prepare a meal combining rice and lentil, the ratio should be 3:1 and in case of wheat and lentil it should be 2:1," he said. Khichuri is a very nutritious food for children, he added.

"If you eat lentils when it sprouts, it is even better for health because it helps digestion process a lot," the nutritionist said, adding that Mung dal and chickpeas are more nutritious.

Despite the important role of lentils in nutrition, the policymakers are putting emphasis mainly on production of rice and wheat to ensure food security but

party would hold those polls if voted to power.

Another presidium member Tofail Ahmed likened the move to hold the polls before parliamentary election to an "attempt towards depoliticisation of politics".

The programme was organised by Awami Swechhasebak League at the party headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue to mark the 78th birth anniversary of Fazilatunnesa Mujib, wife of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Garment worker

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They (police) suspect Azad might have been killed by his fellow garment workers sometime between 2:00am and 8:00am yesterday.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, said Azad's fellow workers found him working until 2:00am.

Victim's brother Abdul Halim filed a murder case with the police station concerned.

Rice prices

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have been falling since last Monday, wholesale market sources said.