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Bapex revved up

Govt hikes gas sale rate to Tk 25 from Tk 7/mcf

SHARIER KHAN

For the first time the government has increased gas sale rate for Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (Bapex) to Tk 25 per thousand cubic metre (mcf) from a miserly Tk 7 to help the company financially grow, sources said.

The government has also approved four drilling projects for Bapex in Semutang, Kapasia, Sundalpur and Srikanil. "We also have allocation in the Annual Development Programme (ADP) for these projects," said a Petrobangla high official.

This is viewed as a major development since Bapex was given only a handful of projects since its inception 19 years ago.

The finance ministry took the decision on gas tariff increase following recommendations from Bapex submitted to the chief adviser in April.

This increase will not affect retail gas sale rate as it applies only to Bapex's earning from gas sale to the government.

Till date the government paid Bapex only Tk 7 per mcf and sold the same at Tk 93, thus financially depriving the national oil and gas exploration company since it came into being in 1989. In contrast, international oil companies get close to \$3 (around Tk 200) per mcf.

Bapex's gas production cost is between Tk 25 and Tk 50 per mcf.

"This means if our gas production remains at the level of last year,

Bapex will earn Tk 37 crore this year. Last year Bapex earned just Tk 13 crore by selling 536 million cubic feet of gas," said a top official of Bapex.

Bapex last year earned Tk 89 crore mostly by providing services to oil and gas companies, while its expenditure was Tk 53 crore. This year's expenditure however is set to rise due to pay increase, and this will be met from the increased gas sale rate.

So far, Bapex has hardly given any project to help it grow. Due to sparse and irregular approval of exploration and development projects, Bapex only has a couple of producing gas wells, which supply only 31 million cubic feet (of gas) per day (mmcf/d).

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CONCEALING CRIME INFO EC to decide fate of Barisal councillor -elect soon

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) will soon decide whether to cancel the candidature of Mortuza Abedin, councillor-elect of Barisal City Corporation (BCC), as an official inquiry found him guilty of concealing information about criminal cases filed against him.

The commission will also decide whether criminal cases will be filed against four mayoral candidates in the August 4 Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) poll, for concealing personal information in their affidavits, sources in the EC said referring to the findings of another inquiry report.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM

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Ctg to get emergency gas, rental power plant

Advisers' council sends back coal policy to ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Council of Advisers at its meeting here yesterday decided to provide 20 mcf (million cubic feet) additional gas and set up a 50-MW rental power plant for immediate and short-term solutions to the acute gas and power crises prevailing in Chittagong.

Chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the meeting also discussed the draft National Coal Policy and asked the energy ministry to place the draft policy again after scrutiny.

Held at Chittagong Circuit

House, the meeting decided to set up a separate gas distribution centre titled "Karnaphuli Gas Systems Limited (KGSL)" to ensure smooth distribution of gas in Chittagong.

To resolve seat crisis in the educational institutions, the meeting decided to increase additional 19,000 seats through infrastructure development of six private schools and setting up of two new model school and colleges here at a cost of Tk 71 crore.

"Different local issues like acute gas and power crises and waterlogging prevailing in the port

city featured in the meeting where we have tried to give some immediate and short-term solutions to the problems," said Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at a press briefing after the meeting.

"Additional gas will be supplied to the industrial units that could not go into operation for want of gas," he said.

"As a short-term solution to power crisis, we have decided to set up a furnace oil-run rental power plant," he said, adding, "Though we know it will be a bit expensive, we have to look for an alternative

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HC grants bail to 16 detained politicos, businessmen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted ad-interim bail to 16 politicians and businessmen, who were arrested in the caretaker government's anti-graft drive.

Two HC benches granted the bail to the detainees in response to separate petitions in connection with different criminal cases filed by the government and Anti-corruption Commission (ACC).

The court also asked the government to explain why the petitioners should not be granted regular bail, and why the proceedings against them should not be quashed.

The accused, who were granted bail, are Ctgong City Corporation

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PHOTO: STAR

Traffic on Syedabad-Jatrabari road came to a near halt yesterday afternoon.

Terrible tailbacks, agonising waits

Capital's traffic system bogs down suddenly

KAILASH SARKAR

Private employee Rezowan Biswas yesterday failed to attend an official meeting as he could not reach his office in time due to severe traffic jam that eats up huge man-hour in the capital every day.

He started at 8:30am from Mirpur Bangla College on a bus to attend the meeting at 10:00am and reached Bangla Motor after a three-and-a-half-hour 'odyssey'. The distance between Bangla Motor

and Bangla College is hardly 10 kilometres.

Like Rezowan, thousands of commuters experience such traffic gridlock every day. Not only business or office people, students also miss their classes and even examinations.

Commuters say the entire city traffic system has collapsed forcing thousands of vehicles to remain stranded for hours and causing untold sufferings as well as huge waste of time.

Traffic sources say the officials, especially the sergeants, are reluctant to perform their duties as they have a lot of "complaints".

Speaking anonymously, a number of traffic sergeants allege they work hard in the stormy weather, rain and scorching sun but are "deprived of various required facilities".

In addition to the traffic cops' reluctance and lack of proper monitoring, age-old and outdated

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KHALEDA'S RELEASE BNP, allies sit today as 72-hr deadline ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led four-party alliance will sit today to discuss new plan of action to secure Khaleda Zia's release from prison as their 72-hour deadline to the government ended last night.

The alliance leaders will hold the meeting at the Nam flat of BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain in the afternoon, according to BNP Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed.

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed, meantime, said his government is trying to expedite the former prime minister's release.

"The matter is under consideration of the government which we think will be finalised at a certain point in time," he told reporters after an advisory committee meeting in Chittagong.

Khaleda was arrested at her cantonment residence on September 3 last year in connection with the Gatco corruption case. She now faces four corruption cases.

Govt not allowed to appeal against HC stay on 2 cases against Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday did not permit the government to file regular appeals against the High Court (HC) orders that stayed the proceedings against Sheikh Hasina in the Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases.

The government recently filed two leaves to appeal with the SC, seeking permission for filing regular appeals against the HC orders and also prayed for vacating them.

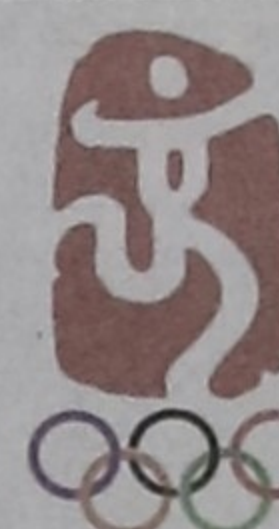
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PHOTO: AFP

Olympics' new king is Phelps

AFP, Beijing



Michael Phelps became the greatest Olympian of all time Wednesday winning two gold medals in the space of an hour to lift his career total to an unprecedented 11 on his charge to Olympic immortality.

As world records continued to tumble in the pool, Phelps passed the halfway point in his drive to be the first person to win eight

gold medals at one Games when he blitzed the 200m butterfly final and led the US 4x200 freestyle relay team.

The champion American has now won five gold medals in Beijing, all of them in world record time, to go with the six he won in Athens.

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| Overall Medal | 6 | 5 | 4 |
|---------------|----|---|----|
| CHN | 17 | 5 | 5 |
| USA | 10 | 8 | 11 |
| KOR | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| GER | 6 | 1 | 2 |

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CORRUPTION ACC to send list of 17 applicants to Tac

They include RHD ex-chief
engineer, top forest official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has decided to send a list of 17 government officials to the Truth and Accountability Commission (Tac) following their applications to the ACC for confessing corruption voluntarily.

The civil servants include a divisional forest officer and a former chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD).

Meanwhile, Tac Chairman Justice Habibur Rahman Khan at a

regular press briefing yesterday said 17 to 18 persons including politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen have so far contacted the Tac on their own directly saying they want to make voluntary disclosure of their corruption.

Sources in the ACC said all the persons who applied to the commission are government officials. Apart from the divisional forest officer and the former RHD chief engineer, six to seven of them are from Bangladesh Inland Water

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DEMO FOR PAY HIKE 50 RMG workers hurt in joint forces action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 50 workers of a garment factory at Shreepur in Gazipur were injured yesterday when members of the joint forces, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police fired gunshots and teargas shells and charged truncheons on them.

The law enforcers went into action to disperse the agitating workers who blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway for over three hours demanding pay hike.

Witnesses said the angry workers of Reedisha Knitex Ltd located at Nayanpur of Shreepur upazila also pelted bricks and stones at the law enforcers.

Earlier, the workers ransacked the factory building and attacked the staffers.

Factory authorities alleged that at least 15 of their staff were wounded in the attacks.

Sources said at 1:00pm during lunch break, over 5,000 workers of the factory staged a demonstration inside the factory to press home their demand for hiking salaries. They started ransacking the factory as their officials did not respond to their demand. When the factory staff tried to resist them the workers swooped on them.

The workers came down on the street at about 2:30pm and blockaded the Dhaka-Mymensingh

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