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Trial of open pit mine mulled

Test case at Barapukuria may start in 2011; feasibility study soon; UNDP, German donor willing to fund

SHARIER KHAN

The energy ministry considers a feasibility study to take up a pilot project for an open pit mine as a test case in the Barapukuria underground coalmine from 2011, taking into account the ever-increasing energy crisis, sources say.

The government, in this regard, is seeking financial and technical assistance from the UNDP and the German donor organisation GTZ, both of which are willing to provide up to \$3 million funding.

The sources say a professional group comprising European and local profes-

sionals is likely to conduct the feasibility study and advise the government on this sensitive matter.

The feasibility study must be conducted within a short time, the sources inform.

Of the country's five identified coal deposits, that of Barapukuria and Phulbari are the nearest to surface, creating the possibility of an open pit mine that allows up to 90 percent extraction of coal.

The open pit method is widely applied in Indian mines including those in West Bengal from where the Indian subcontinent first began coal mining.

The Barapukuria deposit has 389

million tonnes of coal at a depth of 120-450 metres.

The present underground mine will tap less than 10 percent of its coal deposit, or only 30 million tonnes of coal, over a period of 30 years, although the government has invested a staggering Tk 1,600 crore for it.

Since the mine launched its production in 2005, it has produced around 2.5 million tonnes of coal, mine officials say. A 250-megawatt power plant at the mine site is the main consumer of this coal.

The mine has on average a very thick 36-metre high quality coal seam.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BANGLA-MYANMAR BORDER Situation still tense

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Tense situation prevails along Bangladesh-Myanmar border as the latter's military forces continue building up its troops with heavy weapons on the frontiers.

Bangladesh security forces have been kept on high alert along the border, home ministry sources said.

"We are alert to the developments and will take steps accordingly through discussion," Home Minister Sahara Khatun told The Daily Star yesterday. She said the government is seriously looking into the situation.

Security and international affairs expert have suggested that the government prepares for both military and diplomatic measures to face the situation.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

CLIMATE, RECESSION IMPACT Fast aid, flexible terms assured

Muhith tells of WB, IMF pledges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank and IMF in Istanbul assured Bangladesh of providing swift financial assistance under flexible conditions to tackle the global economic recession and impacts of climate change, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said yesterday.

"We have a few achievements. Flexible conditions on loans is one of them," he told reporters during a press conference at the Zia International Airport on his return from the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) annual meetings in Turkey and Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting in Cyprus.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman, Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Finance Secretary Mohammad Tareq, among others, accompanied the finance minister during the visit from September 30 to October 7.

Muhith held meetings with a number of high officials of the WB and IMF and finance ministers of Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and India. He talked about overseas employment opportunity, trade and power.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7



Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize

AGENCIES, Oslo

US President Barack Obama sensationally won the Nobel Peace Prize yesterday, just nine months into his term, with the jury hailing his "extraordinary" efforts in international diplomacy and to hasten nuclear disarmament.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1
MORE STORIES ON PAGES 6



A leak in an underground gas pipe emits gas through a puddle on a road in Pagla in Dhaka yesterday. Locals claimed this has been continuing for almost the last two months.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM

Ombudsman wanted

3 decades into the act, govt starts looking for suitable person

SHAKHAWAT LITON

After around three decades of passage of the Ombudsman Act, the government has finally started looking for a competent person for the position to investigate allegations of corruption and abuse of power by public authorities and recommend action.

"We are looking for a suitable person to be appointed as ombudsman within a reasonable time," Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shafique Ahmed told The Daily Star recently.

The ruling Awami League pledged in its electoral manifesto to make the appointment for establishing good governance, but it has not yet taken any step to that end.

When his attention was drawn to this, the law minister cited the February 25-26 BDR incidents for the delay.

Asked if the act, which was passed in parliament in 1980, requires any amendment to make it up-to-date, he replied in the negative.

Constitutional experts observe that allegations of rampant abuse of power by public authorities are frequent and these allegations cannot be investigated for lack of legal mechanism.

"Often, persons feeling aggrieved approach the Supreme Court in writ jurisdiction. Many of

their grievances are not amenable to writ jurisdiction and the Supreme Court declines to exercise jurisdiction. In the process, there is much waste of time of the Supreme Court that could have been utilised in appropriate cases," former attorney general Mahmudul Islam says in his book "Constitutional Law of Bangladesh".

In line with the constitutional provision on establishing the office of ombudsman, parliament passed the Ombudsman Act in April 1980. But none of the previous BNP, AL or Jatiya Party governments moved to appoint the ombudsman.

The act provides the ombudsman with sweeping authority to investigate any action taken by a ministry, a public officer or a statutory public authority in any case where a complainant in respect of such action is made to him.

Following enquiry, if it appears to the ombudsman that injustices were caused to the complainant or to any other persons in consequence of misadministration, he will recommend that ministries or statutory public authorities concerned provide remedy to the injustices.

On receiving the recommendations, the authority will inform the ombudsman within a month about the actions taken.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

49 killed in suicide blast at Pak market

AFP, Peshawar

A massive suicide car bomb ripped through a packed market in the Pakistani city of Peshawar yesterday, killing at least 49 people and injuring over 100 in a region beset by Taliban attacks.

The blast, which hit around midday, left charred corpses strewn in a shopping area in the city's main Khyber Bazaar, with cars reduced to burning wreckage and a colourful city bus flung on its side.

It was the sixth bombing in the northwestern city in the past four months. A minister blamed the Pakistani Taliban, who have vowed to increase attacks to avenge the killing of their leader Baitullah Mehsud in a US drone strike in August.

"We have 49 dead bodies brought to the hospital. Three of them are women and seven are children," said Doctor Zafar Iqbal, the registrar of Peshawar's main Lady Reading Hospital. All of the dead were civilians, he added.

Senior provincial minister Bashir Ahmad Bilour confirmed the death toll, saying that more than 100 people were injured in the blast. About 50 people remain in a serious condition, doctors said.

At the scene, the blackened bodies of victims lay on the street as injured shoppers in torn and blood-soaked clothing were helped from the rubble.

Passers-by desperately tried to free survivors from a city bus flung over onto its side.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Acid-burnt by drug addict

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Schoolgirl Rokeya Parveen Mou has been passing her agonising days in a hospital bed at Sherpur upazila in Bogra for 23 days as she sustained burn wound when a 22-year-old youth threw acid on her.

Selim Ahmed, brought up for long 14 years by Mou's parents, poured acid on Mou on September 17 just three days before Eid-ul-Fitr as he was asked to leave the house in June after he became addicted to drug, said family members and police officials.

Mou's mother, Kohinur Begum, filed a case against Selim whom she had raised since 1995.

As he was under the influence of drug Kohinur turned Selim out of the house for the sake of other family members, family members said.

Mou is a student of class-X at Sima Bari SR Girls' High School at Sherpur of Bogra who has been staying in Dhaka for about three months with her brother and sister to receive better coaching.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

BNP blasts govt move to change procurement act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition BNP yesterday said the amendments to the Public Procurement Act 2006 would let the corruption spread in public sectors and create a scope for huge nepotism.

The development partners also raised objections to the amendments and the nation hopes they (development partners) will maintain the stance for the sake of good governance and welfare, it also said.

"The amendments will bring nothing but misuse of public money, uncertainty in the quality of work and lack of transparency," Dr Osman Faruk, also a former minister, said at a press briefing held at

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

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