

Granite mining hits rock bottom

No headway in importing explosives; production remains suspended for three months; miners struggling to make ends meet

KONGKON KARMAKER

State-owned rock producer Maddhapatra Granite Mining Company Ltd (MGMCL) could not resume granite production for more than three months. The reason is a crisis of explosives, leaving the government to incur a production loss worth around Tk 1 crore per day.

The production of the country's lone mining company in Dinajpur's Parbatipur upazila was suspended on May 1 as the stock of ammonium nitrate explosives -- which is required to crush stones in the mine -- ran out.

MGMCL officials said they are still uncertain about when a fresh stock of explosives would arrive from India for production to resume.

This is the second instance of granite production being halted due to the explosives crisis this year, after a suspension between March 12 and 27.

MGMCL contributes six percent of the country's annual granite demand of 1.5 crore tonnes. According to the monthly sales data, MGMCL produced and sold 1.18 lakh tonnes of granite worth Tk 29.90 crore in April this year. Around 7 million tonnes of granite have been extracted so far from the mine, which had a reserve of around 174 million tonnes.

according to the granite dealers of the government facility.

The suspension of production will increase granite imports, they feared, adding that it would put additional pressure on foreign reserves at a time when the government is trying to discourage imports as part of austerity

large amount of foreign currency is being used for importing the rocks," he said.

The suspension of production also left around 650 local miners jobless. The company employs around 800 workers on a no-work-no-pay basis.

MGMCL officials said they could not bring a fresh stock of explosives for



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PROF BADRUL IMAM
Energy expert

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measures.

"Many companies are demanding for the mine's rocks. But we are turning them down as production remains suspended," Jugal Chandra Datta, one of the listed 67 MGMCL dealers, told this correspondent.

"We are losing our buyers as they find alternative sources of rocks from India. A

various reasons like vessel crisis, price hike of explosives in the international market and high transport costs.

Besides, a complaint from Germania Trest Consortium (GTC) -- the contracted company of MGMCL for the mine's development, maintenance and production -- about the low quality

of explosives in December last year is also one of the key reasons that stalled the decision to import, said sources in MGMCL.

Energy and mining experts said the long closure of production due to the crisis of explosives only exposed the poor planning of a state-owned company, which has proved to be a losing concern.

Energy expert Prof Badrul Imam said since explosives are the lifeline for granite production, the mining authorities should have formulated a proper plan to import explosives.

"If they initiated the importing process on time, the ongoing situation might have been avoided," he said, adding that the government should step in immediately to expedite the import of explosives from India.

IMPORT IN LIMBO

The process of importing a fresh stock of explosives started in December last year, according to an MGMCL official.

"An LC [letter of credit] for importing the explosives was opened early this year but was cancelled due to GTC's objection. Production would not have been hampered if the consignment could be imported," said the official, requesting anonymity.

In early May this year, MGMCL tasked GTC to import the explosives. A shipment of explosives usually takes more than two

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Rab busts robbery gang, arrests six

UNB, Narayanganj

Rab claimed to have arrested six members of an inter-district robbery gang, including its kingpin, from Purbobhabnathpur area of Sonargaon upazila in Narayanganj yesterday.

The elite force also seized a pistol, a round of bullet, one axe and locally-made sharp weapons from the arrestees, said a press release signed by Lieutenant Colonel Tanvir Mahmud Pasha, commandant of Rab II.

The arrested robbers are leader Shakawat Hossain Rony (25) and his accomplices Md Sohail (32), Md Shahidul Islam (26), Al Amin (23), Md Ismail (38), and Sujoy Dey (30).

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-II conducted a drive and arrested the men, said the release.

During interrogation, the men confessed to committing robberies at two places of Araihazar upazila in the district on April 6 and 24.

Rony admitted that he used to stage dance performances at functions including weddings and birthdays, and develop a close relationship with rich people, the press release said.

Later, the kingpin and his cohorts committed robbery at their targeted houses holding people hostage at gun point.

Moreover, the men have been involved in robberies in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gopalganj and adjoining districts for long, targeting houses of expatriates and rich people, it claimed.

A case was filed with the local police station, the release added.



During monsoon every year, Pirojpur's Aatghar Kurikhana canal hosts a rather interesting market of floating boats. These boats, mainly used for fishing and transporting crops and other goods, are sold in this market for the entire season, ranging from Tk 1,500 to 10,000. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

RU student flees campus after 'assault by BCL'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A student of Rajshahi University (RU) left the campus after allegedly being beaten by Chhatra League leaders.

They also took away Tk 45,000 from him, using his debit card.

The victim, Al Amin, is a senior year student of accounting and information systems. He sent a written complaint to the proctor's office on Thursday.

The accused are Suranjeet Prasad Bitto, vice president of RU BCL; Vashakar Saha, general secretary of Motihar Hall BCL; Mumunir Rahman; Faisal Ahmed; and Tawki Ahmed.

Al Amin said he was forced to leave the campus amid his final exams. According to the written complaint, around 4:30pm on August 17, Bitto and

Vashakar forcibly took him to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall and confined him in a room. Later Mumunir, Faisal and Tawki entered the room and started hitting his head with sticks.

"I lost consciousness. They took away my phone and debit card in that time," said Al Amin.

"Then they forcibly took me to the university's Kazla area and withdrew Tk 45,000, using my card," he said.

At 9:00pm, they left me in Tukitaki area, when police and some campus reporters arrived.

However, Vashakar Saha and Mumunir denied the allegations.

RU proctor Prof Ashabul Hoque told reporters that a three-member probe committee was formed to investigate the incident.

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'Did spending so much change anything?'
Asks Anu Mohammad about power crisis, marking Phulbari Black Day

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Tk 90,000 crore has been paid to different international companies in the last 11 years to get sufficient electricity in the country but to no avail, said Anu Mohammad, member secretary of the National Committee for Oil, Gas, Mineral Resource, Power and Port, at a rally yesterday.

"Why is the country still facing a power crisis?"

Anu, also a former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University, made the remarks during his speech as chief guest at the programme marking the 16th anniversary of Phulbari Black Day, at Nimtolamor in Dinajpur's Phulbari upazila.

On August 26, 2006, around 50,000 people from different villages of Dinajpur's four upazilas -- Phulbari, Nawabganj, Birampur, and Parbatipur -- gathered at Nimtolamor protesting the proposed Phulbari coal mine.

Members of the erstwhile BDR opened fire on the protesters, leaving three dead and scores of people injured.

Anu Mohammad also mentioned how leaders who organised the movement to protect their land in 2006 are now facing multiple cases. He urged the government to withdraw the cases and implement their 6-point demand within October.

Tipu Biswas, chief coordinator of Jatiya Gonofront; Mosaraf Hossain Nannu, member of Secretary Board of Bangladesh United Communist League; Habibur Rahman, central leader of Workers Party; Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad; and Samsul Alam, central member of Master Party, were present in the rally chaired by Saiful Islam, convener of the Phulbari unit of the committee.

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