

Petrobangla eyes 100 more gas wells

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petrobangla presented an ambitious plan yesterday to drill 100 new gas wells in the country aimed at boosting local production.

It unveiled the plan yesterday at a seminar with energy experts and other stakeholders concerned, though it failed to implement its previous plan.

The state-owned company said it will implement the new plan simultaneously with the existing ones. It also said it is ready to appoint foreign contractors alongside three local companies to fulfill its goals.

According to the plan by Petrobangla's Think Tank Team (TTT), 69 of the 100 wells will be exploratory and workover will be carried out in 31 existing wells.

Md Anwarul Islam, managing director of Bakhraabad Gas Distribution Company Limited, and Meherul Hasan, general manager (Reservoir and Data Management) of Petrobangla, presented the plan.

In 2022, Petrobangla initiated the drillings of 48 gas wells, with a target to add around 618 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcfd) by 2025.

The company was supposed to drill 15 wells by December 2023, and 217 mmcfd of gas was supposed to be added to the national grid.

However, Petrobangla yesterday said it has completed the drillings of 11 wells, confirming 126 mmcfd of gas supply. Besides, the workover of three wells is going on.

Only 41 mmcfd of it went to the national grid as the rest of it was found in Bhola, which has no connecting pipeline to the mainland.

The new plan also involves Bhola, raising question of the plan's efficacy in adding more supply to the grid. No projects have been taken up so far to set up a pipeline to connect the district with the national grid.

In the new plan, Bhola Island will have 14 wells, while 17 will be drilled in the Noakhali, Chandpur, Feni, and Chattogram area, and six in the Chattogram Hill Tracts, among others.

Energy division secretary Md Nurul Alam said the government wants to implement both the plans simultaneously.

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People rest next to damaged buildings, as Palestinians arrive in Rafah after they were evacuated from Nasser hospital in Khan Younis due to the Israeli ground operation in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Avoid ‘catastrophic’ Rafah operation

World leaders urge Israel as Netanyahu vows action against Hamas in southern Gaza city

AGENCIES

Israel's vow to push ahead with a “powerful” operation in Gaza's Rafah was met with a growing chorus of international condemnation yesterday, with leaders warning against catastrophic consequences for the 1.5 million Palestinians trapped there.

Australia, Canada and New Zealand warned Israel “not to go down this path”, issuing a rare joint statement in the latest urgent appeal seeking to avert further mass civilian casualties.

“An expanded military operation would be devastating,” they said. “There is simply nowhere else for civilians to go.”

Hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have been driven into Gaza's southernmost city by Israel's relentless military campaign, seeking shelter in a sprawling makeshift encampment near

the Egypt border.

Despite pressure from foreign governments and aid agencies not to invade, Israel insists it must push into Rafah and eliminate Hamas battalions.

- 2,000 reach Rafah after fleeing Nasser Hospital
- 20 Palestinians arrested in West Bank
- Death toll in enclave now 28,663

“We will fight until complete victory and this includes a powerful action also in Rafah after we allow the civilian population to leave the battle zones,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement later on Wednesday.

His comments came a day after talks

in Cairo on a possible ceasefire and the handover of hostages held by Hamas ended inconclusively, stoking fears among the displaced Palestinians that Israel would soon storm Rafah.

The move “amounts to a death sentence” for the 134 hostages in Hamas' tunnels, the relatives of Israeli hostages said, in a sign of growing domestic dissent in Israel after four months of offensive in Gaza.

At least 28,663 Palestinians have been killed, including 87 in 24 hours, and 68,395w ounded in Israeli strikes on Gaza since October7, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

As night fell on Wednesday, more than 2,000 Palestinians who had been sheltering in Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza arrived in Rafah after being ordered to evacuate by the Israeli army, residents and some witnesses said.

9-yr-old strangled to death by stepfather

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

Police yesterday recovered the body of a nine-year-old child buried in a paddy field at Olidah Poshchimpa village in Sirajganj's Solonga, five days after she went missing.

Sanjida Khatun, daughter of Md Shaheen and Jarina Begum, was strangled to death by her stepfather, Shariful Islam, and his accomplice, Hasmat Ali, said Solonga Police Station Officer-in-Charge Enamul Haque.

After the duo was detained on Wednesday night, they confessed to committing the crime, and based on their information, police found Sanjida's body.

The duo was shown arrested in a case filed by Jarina and subsequently sent to jail via a court order yesterday.

Quoting family members, the OC said that after Sanjida's parents got divorced, Jarina married Shariful. A month and a half ago, Jarina left her in-laws over a domestic dispute and went back to her father's house.

Quoting the arrestees, the OC said Shariful and Hasmat decided to kidnap Sanjida, thinking Jarina would come looking for her.

On February 10, Hasmat and Shariful tried to kidnap Sanjida on her way to the madrasa, but when she screamed, the two men strangled her to death and dumped her body in the forest of the local cemetery. Later that night, they buried her body in a nearby paddy field.

8 JMB men jailed in 2016 case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A Bagerhat court yesterday sentenced eight members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to various terms in a case filed in 2016 for attempting sabotage and attacking members of police.

Bagerhat Additional Judicial Magistrate Dr Md Atikus Samad passed the order in the presence of the accused.

Accused Akash Molla, Md Kabirul, and Mizanur Rahman were sentenced to eight years each, said Md Shahiduzzaman, lawyer for the state side.

On the other hand, Zahirul Islam, Maksudur Rahman, and Md Morshed Alam were sentenced to five years each, while Md Saiful Islam and Tariqul Islam were sentenced to two years each, the lawyer added.

The court also fined six of the convicts Tk 10,000 each.

GDP grows 6.07pc in Jul-Sep quarter

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The service sector's growth fell to 3.96 percent from 12.87 percent while the industrial sector grew 9.67 percent from 7.17 percent.

“The growth slowdown is the reflection of the country's macroeconomic situation,” said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

“The country has been persistently facing the dollar crisis and an elevated inflationary pressure for a long time.”

About the agricultural sector's slowdown, the economist said the seasonal factor has contributed to this situation as agricultural production has been hampered severely.

He pointed out lower production of Aman paddy, potatoes, onion and other vegetables.

“As a result, there is a shortage of supply.”

When asked about the performance of the industrial sector, Mansur said exports did not increase as expected. Other manufacturing sectors also saw the same situation.

The economy grew 6.03 percent in the last financial year.

Fakhrul, Khasru

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Speaking to journalists, Khasru said the people supported our movement. “So, we will continue our movement with them until democracy is successfully restored.”

He criticised the Awami League government for “seizing power” through an election that “deprived people of rights”.

“Those who seized power, it [power] must be taken away from them and given back to the people,” Khasru said, adding that they were kept in jail unfairly.

“They [Awami League] have usurped power by depriving people of their rights and holding elections by force. The people of the country have rejected them. They have been morally defeated in the election.”

Fakhrul was denied bail four times by the High Court and lower courts in the case filed over the vandalism of the chief justice's residence. Khasru had also been rejected bail in the same case.

The case was lodged with Ramna Model Police Station on October 29 last year after the police-BNP clash.

Over the incident, 11 violence cases were filed against Fakhrul, while Khasru was made accused in 10 cases.

Earlier, Fakhrul was granted bail in 10 cases and Khasru in nine cases.

Khasru was arrested on November 2, four days after detaining of Fakhrul.

Eight of our institutions usurped

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Yunus, the champion of micro credit and social business models, which are aimed at alleviating poverty and addressing social issues, said he sought help from the police, but “did not get support” while the outsiders occupied the offices of several social business organisations.

Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan yesterday released a statement, saying around 35 people forcibly entered the Grameen Telecom Bhaban without showing their identity cards on February 12.

One of them introduced himself as a former army colonel and said he and the others were from Grameen Bank and they would go to the offices of Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom.

Then they checked the ID cards of the officials and employees, and stopped them from leaving after office hours. Many of the people threatened them in different ways, according to the statement.

Later, they held separate meetings with the managing directors of Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan and said there was a change in the management of the companies.

They told everyone that one of their representatives was on the way with the office orders, said the statement.

At approximately 9:10pm, a representative of Grameen Bank came to the building with seven office orders signed by Prof AKM Saiful Majid, chairman of Grameen Bank.

He appointed himself as chairman of Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan. He also appointed two directors to Grameen Kalyan and three directors to Grameen Telecom, citing clauses of an article of association of the companies, according to the statement.

The statement from Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan said in order to ensure the future welfare of the sons and daughters of all the members of the Grameen Bank, Yunus, in the Articles of Association of Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan and some other Grameen institutions, kept a provision so that they can represent in these organisations on behalf of Grameen Bank.

In 1995, Grameen Bank nominated Prof Yunus as Grameen Telecom Chairman and in 1996 as Chairman of Grameen Kalyan without pay.

Grameen Bank never again for 27 years nominated any chairman apart from appointing two or three directors, according to the statement.

As the Grameen Bank has not

nominated any chairman after the first nomination, Prof Yunus has been elected as a non-salaried and unpaid chairman by the boards of the Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan.

In 2009, a meeting of board of directors of Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom unanimously issued a resolution and amended the provisions in the Articles of Associations barring Grameen Bank to nominate directors, said the statement.

The organisations also informed the matter to the Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in writing, it added.

The sudden appointment of chairman and two-three persons as directors of Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom from outside by the Grameen Bank is nothing but harassment of Prof Yunus, it said.

“This is also a blueprint for destroying the social business organisations,” it added.

“Dr Yunus considers the silence of the government after such a rampage by the intruders as a threat to his life and insecurity,” the statement reads.

At yesterday's press conference, AKM Moinuddin Chowdhury, managing director of Grameen Kalyan, said eight offices were under “unlawful occupation”.

According to Moinuddin, the eight institutions are Grameen Kalyan, Grameen telecom, Grameen Fund, Grameen Shamogree, Grameen Motsho O Pashusampad Foundation, Grameen Shakti, Grameen Udyog and Grameen Krishi Foundation.

“They've kept the offices locked,” said Yunus, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

“You tell me how you would feel if someone else locks you out of your home.

“We reported it to the police. At first, the police did not take the report into account. Later, they just visited once and did not see any problem...”

“Where will we go? No one is beside us. We urge the people of the country to help us.

Replying to a question regarding the process through which managing directors and chairmen of the organisations are appointed, he said each institution has its own rules and regulations.

“Grameen Bank has no right to interfere here.

“Unlawful occupation can not take place in a civilised society...”

“It is a great tragedy for these institutions. If they get trapped in cases, they can lose everything,

and they will not be able to work,” said Yunus, who founded the organisations with the concept of social business.

Asked about the argument by many that the institutions were established with the money from Grameen Bank, Yunus said: “Law is clear. We followed the law properly.”

“The money used to set up the social business ventures came from the pocket of no individuals, not mine.

“We earned it through business. We did not take a single taka from Grameen Bank.”

Asked whether the government was behind the development, he said, “I am leaving the matter for your consideration. We described what we had seen. The people of the country will make the decision.”

The Daily Star could not reach Grameen Bank Chairman Prof AKM Saiful Majid for comments over the phone. One of the correspondents of this newspaper also visited the Grameen Bank office for comments, but he was told that there was no one to make comments.

However, hours after the press conference by Yunus, Grameen Bank in a statement signed by its Head of Media Cell Mst Anju Ara Begum said it has the legal authority to appoint certain number of directors and chairman at the organisations created with the financial support from the microcredit organisation.

It cited the clauses of Articles of Association of Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan and said the directors and chairmen for two organisations were appointed in line with the rules.

Grameen Bank said the claims by Prof Yunus regarding abolition of the provisions that empowered the bank to appoint directors and chairmen in 2009 is “totally false, fabricated, misleading and intentional”.

Grameen Kalyan was established based on then managing director Prof Yunus' proposal placed at the 42nd meeting of the Grameen Bank in 1996, the statement said.

The appointment was made by following the rules and its nominated representatives went to six organisations at the Grameen Telecom Bhaban, the bank added.

Although allegation of forcible occupation has been brought at the press conference, in fact, the representatives were welcomed and offered refreshments. The nominated persons handed the letters containing the decisions of Grameen Bank taken at the board meeting, the bank said.

Editor’s note to readers

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custody within hours of the incident; they were denied bail and sent to jail by the learned magistrate in a Dhaka court; they were later interrogated at the jail gate; and now they are on police remand for four days as ordered by another learned magistrate. Does this bear any sign of our interference in the due process of law? We firmly believe the law will take its own course without any interference.

We would like to unequivocally state that regardless of the person involved, The Daily Star will report on the case as objectively, meticulously and professionally as it normally does. Our reporting will not be influenced in anyway nor will we show any bias in carrying out our professional obligations. We await the completion of the judicial process for our own administrative action on this matter. However, we also need to alert our readers that distortions, exaggeration and twisting and falsification of facts are also occurring in the coverage of this story in a section of the media.

We reiterate this paper's unwavering commitment to upholding the rights of children and report relentlessly against all forms of child abuse. We have been in the forefront of upholding the rights of the poor, disadvantaged and the marginalised which we will continue

unabated. Upholding the rights of all minorities, especially those of ethnic and religious minorities, remains at the core of our policy.

The Daily Star is a value-based and ethically driven newspaper fully committed to the freedom of the media, freedom of speech and expression and other rights and freedoms enshrined in our constitution. We are nurtured in the principles and values of our Liberation War and stand against all forms of injustice and oppression.

We are grateful to those who are making us constantly aware of our obligation to ethical journalism. We also express our thanks to our critics who anticipate and speculate that we may deviate from our value-based journalism because the accused holds a high position in this paper. We are also grateful to those who have already passed severe judgement on us without seeing how we handle the events as they unfold. We thank them all for reminding us of our duties and reiterate that we will unfailingly adhere to them because that is in our DNA, our institutional ethos and personal beliefs.

Thank you.
Mahfuz Anam
Editor and Publisher
The Daily Star

Bangladesh down 2 notches

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The index also judges whether national elections are free and fair, assesses the security of voters, the level of influence of foreign powers on government and the capability of the civil service to implement policies.

A hybrid regime is defined as one where “elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.”

The index says, “South Asia and Southeast Asia already had the lowest scores of all the continent's sub-regions, and setbacks in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand mean that the two regions have fallen even further behind.”

Pakistan has nosedived in the index, and is now being considered an authoritarian regime. Both Bhutan and Nepal's score is lower than that of Bangladesh, while Sri Lanka scored higher, and is considered a flawed democracy.

Afghanistan ranked the worst, being classified as the worst authoritarian regime in the world, while Myanmar is the second-worst. Myanmar is worse than North Korea.

According to the index, both the US and India are flawed democracies, while Canada, Norway, Finland and Sweden are full democracies.