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P8 Why open-pit coal mining in Phulbari will be disastrous



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WR1 The dying art of Qasida



INVITING DANGER... Local influential people are illegally digging the bank of the Bangshi river at Chanpur in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila to collect soil and sell it for filling up low land, putting the entire area at risk of erosion. Collecting soil from river banks is prohibited under the Sand Quarry and Soil Management Act-2010. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

GAS SHORTAGE leaves compressor stations inoperative

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government built two compressor stations in 2016 to supply gas at adequate pressure to different districts, but the expensive machinery has been underutilised due to inadequate gas flow.

The compressor at Elenga in Tangail has never been used because of inadequate gas supply.

The one in Ashuganj, Brahmanbaria, was used only 9.79 percent of the time in 2023.

The state-run Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL) built the facilities at a cost of Tk 1,331 crore. Most of the funds were borrowed from the Asian Development Bank.

South Korea's Hyundai Engineering Co Ltd set up the stations that, according to a recent Petrobangla report, have a "design life of 25 years". Almost a third of their life has elapsed.

From 2019-20 to 2022-23 fiscal years, GTCL paid Tk 309 crore to five foreign firms for operating, maintaining and servicing the machinery, according to a report by a technical committee of Petrobangla.

The compressors were supposed to be supplied with imported LNG and gas from the fields in Sylhet and Brahmanbaria.

The one in Ashuganj was supposed to supply households and businesses in and around the capital with adequate pressure of gas. The one in Elenga was meant to supply gas to the southwestern districts across the Jamuna river.

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UPCOMING UPAZILA ELECTIONS

Many equations on AL's mind

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

Awami League's strategic decision to not use the party's electoral symbol for the upazila polls candidates is aimed at tackling multiple issues at one go.

On the one hand, the ruling party wants to entice the grassroots leaders of the opposition parties, including BNP, into the electoral race. On the other hand, it wants to allow new and popular second-tier AL leaders to contest the polls, scheduled to be held in phases from May 8.

Making the elections participatory and increasing the turnout are also in AL's mind, according to party insiders.

They said the ruling AL lawmakers are taking the election as an opportunity to tighten their grip on the party units in their constituencies by supporting the candidates loyal to them and working to ensure their smooth victories.

The AL leaders and former MPs, who were defeated by fellow party men in January 7 national polls, are also trying to oppose the candidates loyal to the incumbent lawmakers by fielding candidates of their choice to strengthen their position.

Many AL leaders, however, think the party's strategy will deepen internal feud at the grassroots and that the upazila polls would ultimately turn out to be a battle between "AL versus AL".

"The division in the party grassroots created centering the national polls would deepen further over the upazila elections. The situation has become so dire that local Awami League leaders are

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BNP remains split over joining polls

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Although the BNP has decided not to join the upcoming upazila polls as a political party, many party leaders are in favour of allowing its leaders and activists to contest the elections as independent candidates.

The party may allow individuals to run for the race as it would help boost the party's grassroots morale and speed up the organisational activities, said party insiders.

"We will not join the polls as a party, but many of us believe that grassroots leaders should be allowed to take part in the elections. As the polls will be held at the local level, BNP's presence is very important for its future protest programmes," said a standing committee member, wishing not to be named.

The BNP has been staying away from all polls since 2019 and the party expelled its leaders who contested elections going against the party's decision. The party even boycotted the January 7 election, stating that a free and fair election is not possible under the incumbent government.

A senior leader of the party said they will try to convince the party activists not to participate in the polls, but if anyone joins, they will not be expelled.

He added that to hold the public support at the local level, the party should go soft on those who will stand for elections.

The Awami League already decided that it would not permit its leaders to use its electoral symbol - "boat" - in the upazila elections.

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Explosions in Myanmar as ship spotted in Naf river

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Sound of explosions intensified after a Myanmar ship was spotted across the Naf river on the border of Shahparir Dwip in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar yesterday.

Locals said the ship was seen there from Friday morning for a few hours till 11:00pm, then it moved away. Since then, loud explosions have been heard on the border of Shahparir island.

People in the border area said they heard sounds of multiple explosions intermittently from Thursday night to yesterday afternoon. But between 3:00pm and 4:00pm yesterday, there were more than 10 loud explosions.

Mohiuddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Border Guard Bangladesh

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- Two gas compressor stations set up at a cost of Tk 1,331 crore
- Govt spent more than Tk 300 crore in last 4 years for their maintenance
- Elenga station in Tangail failed to operate for a single day in last 8 years
- Ashuganj station in Brahmanbaria struggling to operate due to low gas pressure
- Currently around 2,700 mmcf of gas is supplied against a daily demand of around 4,000 mmcf
- The shortfall of around 1,300 mmcf per day is due to a decline in domestic gas production and less import of LNG

Meat prices up in city markets

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

Prices of beef, chicken and potatoes have increased in the capital's kitchen markets over the last week and a half.

Visiting various kitchen markets in the capital yesterday, The Daily Star found broiler chicken being sold at Tk 210-220 per kg, up from Tk 200-210 around 10 days ago.

At the same time, the prices of all other types of chicken have also gone up in the markets.

Sonali chicken was being sold at Tk 310-330 a kg, up from Tk 300-310 a week ago, and deshi (local) chicken was being sold at Tk 600-650, up from Tk 580-600.

A week ago, beef was sold at Tk 750 per kg, but it was being sold at Tk 780 yesterday.

Md Bashir Miah, a beef seller at West Shewrapara Kitchen Market, said cattle prices have increased by 10 percent.

"Those who sell beef at Tk 750 per kg increase the weight of the beef by soaking it in water," he said, adding that he sells genuine beef, for which he cannot sell it below Tk 780 a kg.

Besides, the prices of potatoes have increased slightly.

Potatoes were being sold at Tk 45 per kg yesterday, up from Tk 40 just three days ago.

Besides, the prices of banana have also gone up by Tk 10-20 per dozen.

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Students stage a demonstration at Buet yesterday protesting a Chhatra League gathering on the campus. Demonstrators said some leaders and activists of the Awami League's student front conducted political activities at the university early on Thursday flouting a ban on student politics.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Buet students protest BCL gathering on campus

STAR REPORT

Several hundred Buet students yesterday took to the streets protesting a gathering of Chhatra League activists in the middle of night on the campus where political activities are banned.

Some central BCL leaders entered the campus around 2:00am on Thursday while 100-150 activists were seen carrying garlands, the protesters said.

BCL sources said leaders of the new committee of Government Bangla College unit BCL and other activists gathered on the campus to greet BCL President Saddam Hossain.

Saddam did not respond to our calls for comments.

The Buet authorities banned political activities on the campus after Fahad Abrar, a second-year student, was beaten to death by some BCL activists at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall on October 7, 2019.

The students placed a six-point demand, including expulsion of 21st batch civil engineering student and central BCL leader Imtiaz Hossain Rahim and others responsible for the gathering, during their demonstration at the university's Shaheed Minar.

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