

# Uncertainty hangs over third Karnaphuli bridge

Site study time slashed, 4 short-listed firms withdraw from bidding

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The future of the proposed third Karnaphuli bridge has become uncertain as the communications ministry has slashed the time required by a bidder for geo-technical and site studies and designing such a bridge so that the project starts before the next general election, sources said.

Engineers and the project's consultants had suggested a time frame of six months for studying and designing such a project but the communications ministry was pressured by the ruling BNP lawmakers and policymakers from Chittagong to cut it down to two

months only.

Now four out of the seven short-listed firms have withdrawn from participating in the bid to be floated on January 15. All the four bidders have cited "unreasonable time allowed for bid preparation" as the reason for their withdrawal, the sources added.

These firms were short-listed last year through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

"The project is conceived as a Design and Build scheme under the Kuwait Fund. It means a potential contractor must evaluate site data and hydrological data, conduct geo-technical studies and then design a bridge, which should

be a safe and well-built one. It takes time to prepare such a design as well as sound technical and financial bids," said a Roads and Highways (R&HD) Department source.

In all other similar bids, a contractor was allowed between four to six months. But this time the ministry has opted for two months.

The four firms which have withdrawn include two Japanese contractors -- Taisei and Shimizu -- who last month declared their intention not to bid. Builder of the Rupsha Bridge project, Shimizu, in a letter to the R&HD categorically stated that "excessive time

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# Cheated hajj pilgrims hem in police station

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The 49 intending pilgrims, who could not go to Saudi Arabia to perform the holy Hajj, yesterday laid a siege to Motijheel Police Station for hours.

Earlier on Friday, police had arrested three owners and officials of the travel agencies concerned for cheating the pilgrims and produced them before the court yesterday, seeking a ten-day remand.

The arrestees are Mohammad Osman Goni, owner of Sweet Travels, Kazi Mafizur Rahman, owner of Kazi Air International, and Moallem (guide) Fayezullah.

Motijheel police arrested them after a case was filed by one of the pilgrims, Jahangir Alam, who hails from Dagonbhuayan upazila in Feni district.

According to witnesses, the

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Traders at Nayabazar cattle market have stretched their business over the Second Buriganga Bridge in the capital, hindering vehicular movement. The photo was taken yesterday.

# Ershad's JP splits again

Bidisha to join new party with Proddhan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Party (JP) led by former president HM Ershad faces another split as its "rebel" president member Shafiqul Alam Proddhan yesterday announced floating of a new party that will be formally launched from a national convention in Dhaka on February 28.

Ershad's former wife Bidisha and a number of JP leaders who have recently resigned from the party will lead the new party styled "Jatiya Party Gonotantik Dhara".

Monoranjan Shil Gopal, who won the recent Dinajpur by-election as an independent

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# Govt, Tata slims gap on incentive

Indian giant now wants 10 years of tax holiday instead of 20 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government and the Tata Group yesterday significantly narrowed down the gap in the matter of incentive as the latter placed fresh proposal to have 10 years tax holiday facility instead of its earlier demand of 20 years.

On the first day of the fourth round talk for the Indian industrial conglomerate's US\$2.5 billion investment negotiation, the Bangladesh government, however,

proposed the group six years tax holiday facility for steel and fertilizer units and 15 years for power sector.

The government offered the group to follow the example of Asian Energy and Lafarge Cement who are enjoying six years tax holiday facility in foreign direct investment.

The Bangladesh side also agreed

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# Babar urges all to help catch

Bangla Bhai, Abdur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday called on the people to help the government to hunt down the top two absconding militant leaders, Bangla Bhai and Shaikh Abdur Rahman, terming them "enemies of Islam."

"If the general people start searching for Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, they will not even find any way to flee," he said while addressing a discussion organised by National Hafiz Society Bangladesh at the Engineers'

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# Doctors battle to save Sharon

AFP, Jerusalem

Doctors battling to save the life of Ariel Sharon carried out a fresh brain scan on the Israeli prime minister yesterday as he remained in a deep medically induced coma at a Jerusalem hospital.

Israeli and world leaders have been bracing themselves for the end of the Sharon era, amid fears his demise will spark new turmoil in a region struggling to find the path to peace after decades of conflict.

Doctors have said privately that Sharon may have suffered irreversible brain damage since he suffered a massive haemorrhage on Wednesday, leaving the future of Israeli politics hanging in the balance ahead of a March election.

But a spokesman for the Hadassah hospital said the latest scan, carried out after the 77-year-old underwent three bouts of brain surgery, had been planned in advance and did not indicate any worsening of his situation.

"It does not mean something

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People leaving Dhaka at Kamalapur railway station yesterday to celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha with their near and dear ones.

PHOTO: STAR

# UN mission chief in Haiti found dead

BBC ONLINE

The commander of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Haiti has been found shot dead in a hotel room.

The body of Gen Urano Teixeira Da Matta Bacellar was discovered early in the morning yesterday in the capital, Port-au-Prince, with a bullet wound to the head.

UN officials said it was likely that he had shot himself.

The Brazilian general had taken over as head of the 9,000-strong peacekeeping force in September last year.

Haiti continues to be blighted by political and criminal violence

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# Tk 3cr fake notes hit markets in a month

Syndicates in Dhaka, Ctg also circulate Indian rupees, US dollars and stamps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Targeting the holy Eid-ul-Azha, the forgers' syndicates have circulated a large number of fake notes equivalent to Tk 3 crore in just a month, police sources said. The forgers have also released fake notes of Indian rupees, US dollars and stamps.

The fake notes of different denominations, produced in Mirpur, Fakirpool, Rampura and Badda in the capital, have been circulated across the country through five powerful and organised syndicates, sources in the Detective Branch (DB) of police said.

The Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) DB has detected a section of the syndicates after they arrested six criminals, including a ringleader, in separate drives in the Port City and the capital in the last

few days.

"The arrested syndicate members confessed that they usually produce fake stamps throughout the year and go for manufacturing and marketing fake notes one or two months ahead of Eid," said AKM Mosharrar Hossain Meazi, senior assistant commissioner of DB, yesterday evening.

He said the police have successfully destroyed the Chittagong network of the syndicates and hope to do the same in Dhaka soon.

These syndicates are mostly based in Dhaka with their network spread over other places, while the production-base of fake notes is located in the capital only, the police official told The Daily Star.

The Chittagong DB in the last four days recovered 110 fake notes of Tk 500 and arrested five criminals of a ring. Of them, Zafar Bhuiyan, Badsha, Azad and

Mosharrar were arrested in the New Market and Laldighipar areas on Wednesday and Thursday while Mamun, the Dhaka ringleader, was held from his house at Uttara in the capital on Friday afternoon.

The police also recovered some equipment and machines including computers from Mamun's house.

The DB earlier caught a former chief of the Chittagong syndicate, Nurul Alam. Another syndicate leader named Akkas died a few months ago.

Arrested Mamun, Mosharrar and others told journalists at the DB office yesterday that a total of seven syndicates, two in Chittagong and five in Dhaka, were previously involved in manufacturing and marketing fake notes across the country.

At present, only the

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# TOLL COLLECTION 30 hurt as BNP factions fight

BDNEWS, Natore

At least 30 people were injured in a clash between two factions of local BNP over toll collection at Kalinagar village under Singra upazila of Natore yesterday.

Three of the injured--Nazma, Zakaria and Nuhu-- received bullet injuries. They are undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH).

Source said Shamsu, a supporter of Ibrahim Khalil alias Fatik, general secretary of Singra upazila Svecchhasebak Dal, and Dulal, a supporter of Fazlur Rahman alias Fonu, vice president of Kalam Union unit of the BNP, had an altercation over collection of toll from a cattle trader at Beeldahar Bazar in the morning.

At one stage, the followers of Shamsu and Dulal were locked in a fierce clash, leaving 30 people injured. Besides, two shops were also damaged during the clash.

The other injured were admitted to Natore and Singra hospital.

# 77 reported Bangladeshis held in India

UNB, Dhaka

Police in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir have arrested 77 Bangladeshi who were trying to cross illegally to neighbouring Pakistan through the state's northern border district of Kathua, an Indian media reported yesterday.

The arrested Bangladeshi were presented before the media on Friday, the ANI reported.

Being tipped-off, police intercepted two vehicles carrying the Bangladeshis and made the arrests.

"After on the spot interrogation, the guide said he got somewhere around 77 Bangladeshis, including six women and a child, and he had brought them for crossing the border," said Jugal Kishore, district superintendent of police at Kathua.

Police also arrested the drivers of the vehicles that were carrying the Bangladeshis. The drivers, however, feigned ignorance on the true motive of the guide.

# 14-party meet urges all to resist fresh voter list bid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party opposition combine yesterday urged people to resist the ongoing preparation of fresh voter list, terming it "politically motivated".

Leaders of the Awami League (AL)-led combine have blasted the chief election commissioner (CEC) for continuing the new voter list preparation and said he has violated the High Court (HC) order in this regard.

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# Muggings, extortions on rise before Eid

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Incidents of extortion and mugging have significantly risen in the capital ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha as the law enforcers and intelligence concentrate their activities on arresting Islamist militants and preventing possible attacks of suicide bombers, sources said.

Murder has also seen a sudden rise as the criminals, desperate after being refused tolls, are killing people.

Intelligence sources said some listed criminals, who went into hibernation following drives

against them before the August 17 countrywide serial blasts, have returned to the capital and are now supervising the toll-collection.

They are killing people as a warning to the businessmen "so that they do not dare to refuse them tolls", the sources observed.

Police sources said at least 20 people were killed in the capital in the last 20 days, most of them triggered by toll-refusal, conflicts over supremacy in the area and tender.

The first incident of this killing spree took place on December 19 when assailants opened fire on a wedding reception ceremony at Shajahanpur Railway Officers'

Club in Motijheel. A construction contractor was killed and four others were injured in the incident centring a feud over tender.

Two other significant murders of the 20 incidents are murder of a businessman in Mirpur and a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader in Mohakhali.

Local criminals Shahadat and Khorshed and their gang shot businessman Aftab Uddin near his house in Mirpur on December 25 as he refused to pay the gang a toll of Tk 10 lakh. Aftab succumbed to his injuries at a city hospital after four days.

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# Tigers blow up navy gunboat: 15 killed

AFP, Colombo

Suspected Tamil rebels blew up a naval gunboat yesterday killing 15 Sri Lankan sailors in a suicide attack that caused the biggest military loss of life since a truce began four years ago, the military said.

The pre-dawn attack came as the United States expressed concern over the recent escalation of violence that has stoked fears of a return to civil war in the Indian Ocean island nation torn by ethnic conflict.

"The boat exploded and we

believe it is an LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) suicide attack," defence ministry spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe said.

An explosives-packed fishing boat was believed to have rammed the Israeli-built Dvora-class gunboat which was on a routine patrol outside Trincomalee harbour, 260km northeast of here, he said.

"There were two gunboats in the area and one saw the other being attacked," Samarasinghe said.

The strike which killed 15 sailors including two officers inflicted the biggest single military loss of life

since the Norwegian-brokered truce took effect in February 2002, the military said.

Two sailors from the 17-member crew were rescued by other military craft.

Separatist Tiger guerrillas are known to have carried out suicide attacks against dozens of naval craft in the past using small boats packed with explosives.

There was no Tiger reaction but they normally deny involvement in attacks.

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Prayer Timing		
January 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation