

Policy takes U-turn

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The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said he believes the new projects have been incorporated in the ADP due to political pressure. If roads are constructed near a minister or MP's village home there will be some development work going on in the area, and the ruling alliance people will also make some money from them. "If a large number of projects are taken up, money is wasted on the one hand and on the other hand low quality projects enter into the ADP," Bakht said.

"We have been expecting an ADP in line with an austere budget since there are various challenges in the present national and international economies and since three different governments are going to implement the new budget. Adding Tk 4,500 crore to the new ADP is not pragmatic under the circumstances." Transport is among the four sectors that have received the highest allocations in the revised current ADP, while it has received the second highest allocation in the coming fiscal's ADP.

There are 22 projects in the transport sector. One of those projects -- construction of a bypass road in Jhenaidah -- will cost Tk 19 crore. But in the revised current ADP only Tk 50 lakh and in the coming fiscal's ADP only Tk 2 crore have been earmarked for the road. The Chalmohor--Hamkura road development will require Tk 34 crore, but only Tk 1 crore in the revised current ADP and Tk 5 crore in the coming fiscal's ADP have been allocated for the road.

Small allocations have been given for many such road projects and there are chances of misappropriation of money, sources said.

Last week, BIDS sent 'Policy Recommendations for National Budget 2006-07' to the government where it said, "A large number of road projects are often taken up on political considerations resulting in very thin distribution of resources over many road projects and consequent slow rate of project implementation."

It pointed out that among 183 projects in the transport sector in the original ADP of the current fiscal, 138 were road projects.

"Because of a large number of road projects, resource allocations to these projects have been such that at the current rate of implementation, nearly 20 percent of the projects will require a completion time of more than 10 years while about 10 percent of them will require completion time of more than 20 years," the BIDS recommendation said.

In rural development and institution sector there are quite a few projects with similar names like 'rural development', 'rural road development', 'marketplace development' etc. Experts said in such projects chances of corruption are traditionally high. But still allocation to this sector is conspicuously higher than many other needy sectors.

Under the public priority, rural communication and haat-bazar development and rehabilitation project, Tk

China, India sign military accord

AFP, Beijing

China and India signed an agreement yesterday to expand defence ties, the Chinese foreign ministry said, in a deal that is expected to see the neighbours conduct more military training exercises.

The memorandum of understanding was signed during a visit by Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee to Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao told reporters.

"Military exchanges will be an important part of bilateral ties," Liu said.

"Reinforcement of mutual trust and exchanges will be beneficial for the development of all-round cooperation partnership in the two countries."

The Indian defence ministry said ahead of Mukherjee's trip, which began Sunday, that the agreement would institutionalize training, exercises and other contacts between the armed forces of the countries.

The agreement would aim to develop a "strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity between India and China," and enhance trust between their two militaries, the ministry said.

The China Daily reported Monday that the agreement could become an instrument for a regular and sustained dialogue between the two countries on defence issues.

Mukherjee held meetings with his Chinese counterpart Cao Gangchuan and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on Monday, then met with Premier Wen Jiabao on Tuesday.

During his five-day trip, Mukherjee will also visit military bases in Beijing and Shanghai as well as in Lanzhou, the capital of northwest China's Gansu province, the Indian embassy said.

China-India relations have improved in recent years as both countries have made efforts to complement instead of compete with each other's growth.

However, the two still have not resolved a decades-old border dispute -- the result of a brief but bitter conflict in 1962.

ACC sends letter

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Division, meanwhile, said in the wake of controversy the government may consider increasing posts in the ACC organogram and any correction can be made if necessary.

Sources said the ACC also informed the government how the organisational structure prepared by the Cabinet Division conflicts with the ACC Act.

The Cabinet Division will place the proposal for the ACC organogram before the National Implementation Committee on Administrative Reforms (Nicar), headed by the prime minister, for final approval. The Nicar will decide on the matter at its June 6 meeting.

Upon learning the Cabinet Division move, the ACC held an emergency meeting on Monday and took a unanimous decision of rejecting the government's proposed organisational structure.

The ACC also attached the minutes of the meeting and other relevant papers to the letter.

Govt to ask SC

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hearing the death references of the militants' cases if it maintains the existing serial.

The Jhalakathi court sentenced JMB chief Abdur Rahman, operations commander Siddiqui Islam and five others to death.

The law minister said the government will take quick steps for hearing of the death references of the militants' cases by preparing paper book on priority basis.

Meanwhile, the copy of the verdict in the two judges' killing case in Jhalakathi reached the HC yesterday, sources said.

Four repairmen

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was undergoing a renovation work 10 years after it had been built. Two local contractors, Tushar and Dupley, have been doing the work.

According to police, a mould of the south portion of the bridge collapsed at about 12:30pm on the workers, who were working under the bridge.

The injured workers are Mahbub, Tariq, Kalu and Kased.

Police recovered and sent the bodies to Meherpur General Hospital.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Meherpur Talukdar Shamsur Rahman and Superintendent of Police of the district SM Rokunuddin visited the spot.

The contractors have fled the area, police said.

Kuwait fund

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kilometre long Padma bridge with facility of train communication," he said.

The previous Awami League government first took the initiative for construction of the Karnaphuli bridge and it conducted a feasibility study in 2001, sources in the communications ministry said.

After assuming power, the present government in its first cabinet meeting approved the project and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia laid the foundation stone of the bridge on April 19, 2003.

The tender for construction of the bridge on build, own and operate basis was invited on January 15 this year.

BNP cadres

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Anisuzzaman said Shahidul in a meeting on May 28 threatened to throttle the daily within 24 hours. The meeting was held only 100 yards from the Dainik Andolaner Bazar office. Three ruling party lawmakers of the district were also present in the meeting.

When contacted Editor of Dainik Andolaner Bazar, now in Dhaka fearing attacks on him, said a vested quarter is conspiring to gag the newspaper.

Termining Monday's attack pre-planned he expressed his determination to keep on denouncing crime against all odds. "We will continue publishing our paper if local administration takes proper security measures," he added.

Contacted, the ruling party lawmaker Shahidul told 'The Daily Star', "Dainik Andolaner Bazar with its baseless reports was sullying my image." He however denied his involvement in the incident regarding the shutting down of Dainik Andolaner Bazar.

2,500-year-old

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among the relics discovered during a Bangladesh-France joint excavation at the Mahasthan site in Bogra in 1999.

The other artefacts that are around 2,500-year old include ring stones, bronze mirrors, a huge collection of coins, bronze statues and terracotta pieces of different periods.

A high official of the Archaeology Department said a few antiques have been preserved in display boxes in the museum. However, most of the finds including the stove, the coins and statues could not be properly displayed due to the shortage of display box as well as space and other facilities.

A source at the department said most antiques including the bronze statues, terracotta pieces of the Gupta period have been kept in store without proper care.

Accords with workers

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and labour federations signed during 1997-2005, the labour leader demands included minimum wages, maternal leave, identity cards, weekly holiday and emergency exits. They also demanded that main gates of the factories be kept open in case of an emergency.

Although the deals provided that the factory gates would not be under lock and key in emergency situations, this is not being followed. The accident at KTS garment in Chittagong on February 23 is an example of such violation of the decision.

Issuance of renewable identity cards for all workers, as agreed upon after the Globe Knitting factory incident in year 2000, is also yet to be a reality.

A section of garment workers in Tejgaon area blamed some labour leaders' unholy alliance with the owners for the delay in implementing these agreements or non-implementation of those. It is the responsibility of both the garment owners and labour leaders to implement the worker's demands raised in the last one decade, they felt.

The garment owners and labour leaders however blame each other for non-implementation of workers' demands.

Delwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Oikya Parishad, said, "Actually, the owners come to consensus with workers' federation when they fall in trouble like labour unrest. They use the deals as tools to defuse unrest."

"Without ensuring compliance, it is very difficult to get export orders from the buyers," he added.

Byers, the writ petitioner against minimum wages, he said, "It concerned a procedural problem. But garment owners are still ready to implement the minimum wages that the government will suggest".

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, assistant executive director of BILS said, "The big problem is that most of the garment owners do not agree to obey labour laws." The deals already signed are merely an eyewash to bypass the demands of workers, he added.

IF BGMEA leaders would have taken effective steps to make its members implement the deals, there would be no workers unrest in Bangladesh's garment industry, he stressed.

3 killed in 'encounters'

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Alamgir and Faruq were killed when Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men and their accomplices were involved in a fire-fight at Shyamoli in the capital while Saidur was killed in crossfire when police and his accomplices engaged in a gun battle at Mujibnagar in Meherpur early yesterday.

Family members of Alamgir and Faruq claimed the two were missing for the last two days.

Rab claimed they raided a club in Shyamoli around 1:10am where four to five men were allegedly planning criminal activities. As Rab men reached the spot, the alleged goons opened fire on them from their hideouts to which Rab retaliated. During the battle, a number of the gangmen managed to escape while Rab claimed to have found bullet-riddled Alamgir and Faruq on the spot.

Rab also recovered an automatic pistol, one pipe gun, several bullets, two cellphones and several bottles of phenylethylamine from the spot. The law enforcers said both the dead were accused in different cases including murder cases.

Rab filed two cases against the two with Mohammadpur Police Station, one for attacking the law enforcers and the other under Arms Act.

Meanwhile, Faruq's father Mujibur Rahman told 'The Daily Star Faruq, driver to a Major of Comilla Cantonment, had been residing near the cantonment in Comilla with his family for several years.

Quoting Faruq's wife Shilpi, Mujibur said Faruq left home on Sunday around 7:00pm after receiving a phone call. He has been missing since then. His family members tried to call him over telephone several times but could not reach him.

"Learning about the so-called 'encounter' on TV, I went to

Mohammadpur Police Station and later found his body at Dhaka Medical College (DMC) morgue," he added. He claimed no criminal case was filed against his son with any police stations.

Meanwhile, Alamgir's mother Rokeya Begum said her son worked as an electrician for an electronics company. She said on Sunday evening someone called Alamgir over the phone and he went out saying he was going to Shubchar of Madaripur to visit his grandmother. He had been missing since then. Learning about the death of her son she also found the body at DMC morgue.

Claiming her son 'clean', she said, "I am challenging my son was not involved in any criminal activities."

Meanwhile, Saidur was killed in an encounter with police at his home in Tungi Gopalpur near Mujibnagar in Meherpur. Saidur was the Meherpur district commander of Janajuddho, police claimed.

According to police, they arrested Saidur at a house in Mujibnagar upazila on Monday evening. Later, following his information a police team went to Tungi Gopalpur with him to arrest his accomplices and recover hidden firearms.

When the police team reached Khoksa around 4:30am yesterday, Janajuddho operatives ambushed the team. Police retaliated leading to a gun battle.

Police claimed Saidur, trying to escape custody during the battle, was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot. Police however failed to recover any firearms or arrest anyone.

Police claimed Saidur was accused in six murder cases filed with Mujibnagar Police Station.

Boishakhi TV

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Court, Dhaka against Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas and MD of the channel Kazimohammad Shahidullah.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun Al Rashid recorded statement of the complainant and directed the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan Police Station to submit a report by June 27 after an investigation into the matter.

In his complaint, Bulu mentioned that due to his conflicts with Shahidullah over running the channel, he had earlier decided to withdraw his No 117 share from the channel and informed Shahidullah about it over telephone on April 16 this year.

Shahidullah told him that he (Bulu) would have to sign a form if he wants to withdraw his share, to which the complainant agreed given that all his money against the share is returned.

But Shahidullah threatened him saying that his (Shahidullah) close friend Mirza Abbas would kill the complainant if he does not hand over the share without taking any money, Bulu added.

Later, on May 10, the defendants again threatened the complainant to hand over the share while he was abroad.

Moreover, being directed by Mirza Abbas, the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) on May 25 made attempts to demolish the ground floor of the complainant's Bulu Ocean Tower in Banani and damaged a lot of the floor violating the rules and provisions of the Rajuk. The minister is threatening continuously over telephone to kill him, the complainant said.

When the complainant went to the Gulshan Police Station to file a case for the threats over telephone, police refused to register it as a regular case. So he filed the case against the accused with the court, Bulu added.

Advocates Taposh Kumar Dutt, Abdus Shukur and Liakat Ali Shikder appeared for the complainant.

Sonargaon Hotel

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However, he said the Kingdom Group does not want to set up any new hotel here. Rather, the group intends to buy an existing one.

"We have no plan to invest in other areas," Nikos Hadjossaid.

Prince Talal, the owner of Kingdom Group, proposed Bangladesh government last year to purchase Sonargaon Hotel.

Later, the government at a cabinet meeting decided not to sell the hotel considering its profit margin.

The hotel has given Tk 516 crore to the government as tax since its operation in 1981 and earned a net profit of Tk 110 crore during this period. Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry sources said.

Alamgir said Pan Pacific Group, the present operator, is managing the hotel quite well and there is no reason for its handover to others.

In the last fiscal year, the hotel had earned Tk 20 crore net profit, the minister noted.

"We have offered them to set up new hotels or to purchase Hotel Saikat in Chittagong and the government will support them with everything, including land," he added.

He said the Kingdom Group will inform us of its decision after consulting Prince Talal.

The agreement between the government and the Pan Pacific Group for operation of the management of the Sonargaon Hotel will expire in June next year.

"The Pan Pacific Group has already offered us to continue operation, but we will take the decision at the board meeting," the minister said.

Sonargaon Hotel was built in 1981 with a loan of Tk 33.87 crore given by the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) of Japan, according to sources.

12 companies

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The companies are Globelec Summit Consortium, Orion & Delta Power, Power Line Engineering of Thailand, Noorpoor Technologies, Maser (M) SDN BHD of Malaysia, Maining Industries, Marubeni Corporation of Japan, PHP Power Generation, China-Metallurgical Construction Group, AES Technologies of USA, YTL Power of Malaysia and the GMR Energy of India, according to officials sources.

They said this was the third tender invited for the project to implement it on build-own-operate (BOO) basis. Yesterday was the last date for submission of tender documents.

The first tender was invited in 2003 and it was rejected by the Prime Minister's Office. The second tender was invited in 2005 and the government rejected the bidding again as it found it technically faulty and the financial offer higher.

Among the firms, Summit had vied in the first tender under a joint venture with Power Development Board (PDB) while its partner Globelec is now operating the 450MW Meghnaghat and 360MW Haripur power plants. Summit has also been operating three small power projects in the country.

These two power plants were the country's first base-load plants and US-based AES Corporation installed the projects.

Of the Orion & Delta Power, Orion owned the 450MW Meghnaghat Power Plant offering the lowest ever power tariff for the project.

As per the rule, Power Cell, the implementing agency of the power ministry, will scrutinise the bidding documents of the aspirant bidders.

After the scrutiny, the officials said, the responsive bidders will be asked for submitting their technical and financial offers.

Udichi blast case

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The judge also fixed June 27 for further arguments in the cases.

At about 12 noon, the Special Tribunal Judge Abul Hossain Bepari came to the court and informed the parties and lawyers present that he had encountered some legal complexities while examining the documents for preparing the judgment adding that he required more legal explanations and arguments from both sides.

The court premises and the adjoining areas were cordoned off by the police and the Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) as part of the strict security measures taken up by the administration due to the scheduled delivery of judgment yesterday.

Besides, several hundred curious people and journalists also thronged the court compound to hear the verdict.

Earlier on May 25, Special Tribunal Judge Abul Hossain Bepari fixed the date of delivering the verdict of the two cases filed for the Udichi tragedy after a long hearing and arguments.

On March 7, 1999 two high-

powered bombs went off at the Munshi Meherullah Maidan in the town at the 12th annual national conference of Udichi, killing 10 people and injuring 200 others.

After the incident Sub-inspector (SI) Abdur Aziz filed a case with the Jessore Kotwali Police Station without mentioning any names.

On December 14, 1999 Senior Assistant Superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Dulal Uddin Akand submitted a charge sheet to a Jessore court accusing 24 people including Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam, the then opposition BNP leader, and another BNP leader Nurun Nabi.

The court framed charges on July 9, 2000.

The High Court cleared the charge against Tariqul Islam on August 12, 2003.

In the last hearing on May 25, 22 accused were present out of total 23.

Defence lawyer Debashish Das told the journalists that the accused denied their involvement with the incident and were pressurised to give statements under section 164.

EU puts LTTE

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slapped on the group by the 25-member European Union (EU) Monday.

"The government is of the firm conviction that solutions to the issues at hand have to be sought only through political means and not through military means," a statement from Rajapakse's offices said.

"It therefore rejects any suggestions that these measures by the international community would or should encourage any military option by anyone."

Tigers guerrillas had earlier argued that their intentional isolation could encourage Sri Lanka's government to launch an all out offensive against them and seek military solution to the drawn out ethnic conflict.

"The government hopes that this clear and firm message would provide a fresh impetus and encouragement to the LTTE to think afresh and resume talks with the assistance of the Norwegian facilitators," the statement said.

The military and police meanwhile were Tuesday investigating reports that the Tigers had shot dead 12 construction workers in the restive eastern province.

A total of 14 men from the majority Sinhalese community were killed on Monday night, military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe said, quoting two survivors.

"Two men escaped with gunshot injuries and reported to police this morning," Samarasinghe said. "We are sending a team to investigate (but) getting to the area is slow because of fears of mines."

Two policemen were wounded in a mine attack elsewhere in the island's north on Tuesday morning, Samarasinghe said.

The report of the massacre came as the EU ban on the LTTE took effect, cutting off the group's funding from Europe, and while Sri Lanka's key international financial backers met in Tokyo to discuss their engagement.

The US, the EU, Japan and Sri

lanke's peace broker Norway were meeting in Tokyo Tuesday to review the island's faltering peace process amid fears that the nation of 19.5 million people was slipping back to full-scale war.

There was no immediate reaction from the Tamil Tigers to the EU ban, but the Tigers had earlier said that the widely expected proscription could jeopardise peace efforts and have implications for Scandinavian truce monitors.

Three of the five nations contributing staff to the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission are from Sweden, Denmark and Finland, all three countries with membership in the EU unlike Norway and Iceland which are non-EU nations.

In what Western diplomats here saw as a last ditch attempt to stall the EU ban, the Tigers on Monday accepted an invitation from Norway to travel to Oslo next month to discuss how to shore up the ceasefire agreement.

It was not immediately clear if the Tigers would reconsider their decision, but the LTTE's political wing leader S. P. Thamilselvan told a pro-rebel website Monday that an EU-wide ban on the group would affect the peace process.

An EU diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said in Brussels that the LTTE had brought the ban on itself.

"If they had been serious at the negotiating table we could have thought about another way, we would have set up a virtuous circle, instead of this vicious circle that we're in at the moment," he said.

However, Sri Lanka's aid donors meeting in Tokyo are expected to nudge both sides to resume peace negotiations and scale down violence that had claimed over 600 lives since December.

Pakistan and India opened talks in the Pakistani capital yesterday on combating terrorism and drugs trafficking as well as on practicalities for the exchange of civilian prisoners, officials said.

In a goodwill measure between the nuclear-armed rivals ahead of the two days of talks, India released 59 Pakistani fishermen before Islamabad reciprocated freeing 71 Indians.

The talks are part of a slow-moving peace process that has improved relations between the two neighbours but is yet to produce a breakthrough on the Kashmir dispute that lies at the heart of decades of strained ties.

Indian Home Secretary V. K. Duggal told reporters after his arrival in Islamabad late Monday that the two sides would finalise a Memorandum of Understanding on increased cooperation in curbing drug-trafficking.

Pakistan and India agreed in September last year to free all prisoners who have served their sentences, and both sides are in the process of determining the number of such prisoners.

India accuses Pakistan of sending armed militants into its zone of Kashmir to foment a 17-year old insurgency against New Delhi's rule in the divided Himalayan state. Pakistan, which holds the other zone, denies the charge.

Tk 40.71 cr

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of the Parliament Secretariat Commission today for approval, sources said.

In the draft budget the JS secretariat sought Tk 18.65 crore for employees, Tk 15.75 crore for lawmakers, Tk 2.54 crore for chief whip and whips, Tk 1.17 crore for parliamentary committees and Tk 1.03 crore for the speaker and deputy speaker.

The Parliamentary Secretariat Commission at today's meeting will also discuss the creation of more than 200 posts in parliament that include security guards, private secretaries to the chairman of the parliamentary standing committees, committee officers, record suppliers, operators and drivers, the sources said.