

Rush for record govt procurements

Cabinet body sits today to consider 23 dubious deals worth Tk 2,447 cr

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and SHARIEF KHAN

The Cabinet Purchase Committee is set to consider today, approval of a record number of government procurements worth over Tk 2,447 crore, many of which were rejected earlier by the government itself while the others were identified as irregular.

There are 21 projects worth Tk 708 crore on the official agenda of the purchase committee meeting while two other schemes might be tabled as 'miscellaneous' items today.

Sources said various vested interest groups involved with the problematic projects believe that

there is a little time to rectify the anomalies and for getting them approved by the purchase committee within the tenure of the current government.

These vested interest groups include powerful young politicians of the alternative powerhouse of the government, a son of an influential senior minister, a section of bureaucrats, and pro-government business lobbies.

Of these procurement proposals, there are three from the telecoms ministry. Interestingly all the three have serious anomalies. There are 12 projects from the housing ministry the majority of which has anomalies. The local government and rural develop-

ment (LGRD) ministry seeks approval for two projects one of which has allegations of irregularity against it. The ministries of health, communications, industries and power each have one proposal.

The two 'miscellaneous' projects are the Tk 1561 crore machine-readable passports, visas and national identity cards scheme and the Tk 139 crore Dapdapia Bridge construction project. The purchase committee rejected both of these schemes in the recent past. TELECOMS SCAMS

The first agenda will be the telecoms ministry's Tk 32 crore proposal for installations of high capacity optical fibre line and

synchronous digital hierarchy (SDH) transmission link connecting Dhaka-Bogra-Rajshahi-Nawabganj, and Moghbazar-Srinagar, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) in its June 2005 bid selected a Chinese company, Huawei Technologies.

The Daily Star last week reported that Huawei treated members of the technical evaluation committee, in the tendering process, to foreign trips.

However, following formal objections from an aggrieved bidder ZTE that BTB had blatantly favoured Huawei, a government review panel found that both the bidders had actually been unresponsive

AUG 21 ATTACK US congressmen write PM for new, fully free probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighteen congressmen of the United States, including the chair of Bangladesh Caucus, sent a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia asking for a new and fully independent investigation in the August 21 grenade attack on the Awami League (AL) rally that killed at least 23 people in 2004.

This was a calculated attack with enormous political implications since the entire leadership of the Awami League was present at the rally, the letter sent on August 17 said.

In the letter, the congressmen representing both Democrats and Republicans, categorically criticised the government for its failure to bring the perpetrators of the attack to justice and said the evidence was not preserved properly for investigation.

This was a high-level reaction from the US side on the eve of second anniversary of the deadly attack on AL rally, which was a

VOTER LIST UPDATING Voter number rises as field-level task ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The field-level task of updating the voter list ended yesterday with many eligible voters remaining left out. The number of voters is now over 9.14 crore, one lakh more than the nullified draft voter list published on May 3.

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday at a meeting decided not to extend time for the field-level task ahead of the next parliamentary elections due to time constraints. It also decided not to initiate steps to demarcate the constituencies as the last census report was yet to be published.

Asked about the EC's stance on the field-level task, the Secretary to the EC Secretariat Abdur Rashid Sarkar in a press briefing said, "The commission is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it. The EC has just been informed about the overall situation."

Neither the chief election commissioner (CEC) nor any other election commissioners were present in the briefing.

The secretary claimed they have satisfied the political parties by updating the voter list.

Meanwhile, reports from different areas claimed many eligible voters were not listed as the temporarily appointed EC staffs failed to visit their homes.

The EC secretary however said they would take special measures if they found large number of eligible voters left out of the list. "We have successfully completed the task and only five per cent voters may remain out of the list," he claimed.

He said one could register oneself as a voter any time before the next parliamentary elections by visiting the local election offices.

The secretary said according to last Saturday's figures, a total of 1.63 crore people have applied for

inclusion of their names while 23.74 lakh people applied for deletion of names from the existing voter list.

The number of voters now stands over 9.14 crore after adding and deducting the number of applications for inclusion and deletion.

The number may rise further as the applications received on the last day of updating the list were not taken up for execution.

The nullified draft voter list published on May 3 this year had 9.13 crore voters which triggered an enormous controversy over the unusual rise in the number of voters.

The EC has not checked the authenticity of applications received by the field-level EC staffs while visiting door to door from July 21 till yesterday.

Apart from duplicate names, SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

GRENADATE ATTACK ON AL RALLY Questions left unsolved

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and SHAMIM ASHRAF

Two years into the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally on the Bangabandhu Avenue to assassinate party chief Sheikh Hasina, many questions still remain unanswered.

Who plotted the attack, what was the motive behind it, who supplied the grenades, how were the same type of grenades sneaked into Dhaka Central Jail, why was the evidence destroyed deliber-

ately, and why were two victims buried hurriedly have remained mysterious since the attack that killed 23 people and maimed and injured about 300 others.

The government has not only shown lack of interest in bringing to justice those who carried out the grisly attack but is yet to say why the law enforcers totally failed to ensure security and arrest any of the attackers from the spot.

Although the government attempted to earn public acclamation and calm down the demand

for justice by inviting the Interpol and US Federal Bureau of Investigation, it has failed to make any credible revelation into the mystery.

The investigators attempted to submit the charge sheet in the case over a year ago basing on the confessional statement of one Joz Mia, but the government held them back following media flak that termed Joz Mia's story very weakly-woven.

The government and intelligence agencies still continue



Rumi Islam, one of the 300 injured in August 21, 2004 grenade attack on Awami League rally, still bears splinters in her body.

GRENADATE ATTACK Govt's failure in probe draws flak

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Eminent citizens and opposition political leaders yesterday termed the August 21 grenade attack on the main opposition in the parliament as the most brutal in the country's political history.

They said perpetrators of such a highly calculated and planned attack should be brought to justice to prevent a similar incident in the future.

Expressing their reactions on the eve of the second anniversary of the attack, leading jurists, academics, former bureaucrats and leaders of different opposition political parties severely criticised the government for its failure to investigate properly the deadly attack which killed 24 and injured about 300.

They said the attack was an attempt to eliminate the entire Awami League (AL) leadership including Sheikh Hasina.

"The present government grossly failed to carry out an effective investigation and to bring to justice the perpetrators of the grenade attack on Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina,"

Govt 'unaware' of Huji comeback

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday claimed ignorance about the Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) meeting in the capital on Friday despite the fact that several identified and most sought-after leaders of the banned militant outfit held the rally openly and that members of intelligence agencies were present near the meeting venue.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar said yesterday he learnt about the meeting from newspaper reports on Saturday.

Meanwhile, 72 hours into the Huji meeting under the banner of Sachetan Islami Janata at the north gate of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, the law enforcers are yet to find any of the high profile Huji leaders who attended the rally.

Although newspapers published detailed reports on the meeting, accompanied by photographs showing the Huji leaders sitting on the dais, the law enforcers are yet to be sure about the identity of these leaders.

Babar said he was out of Dhaka on Friday and Saturday, and after being informed of the newspaper reports over telephone, asked the

law enforcers and intelligence men on Saturday to "find out the fact" and submit a report.

He, however, did not receive the report as of yesterday afternoon. "I hope I will get the report in a day or two," Babar said.

The state minister said there is no necessity of taking any new step against Huji. "We have already banned the organisation and we will go for immediate action upon getting any information," he said.

Babar avoided answering whether he received any prior information from the intelligence agencies about the Huji leaders' gathering and holding a rally at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram.

People, who are yet to forget the rise of the Islamists militants over the past few years and their countrywide bomb blasts, witnessed the top leaders of the banned militant outfit holding programmes successfully and going untouched.

The government, however, is yet to show any willingness for capturing the militants. It rather seems sceptical about the newspaper reports.

"We will have to check how much of the information is true. We



Activists of Awami League Cultural Forum make a symbolic reconstruction of the August 21, 2004 mayhem on Bangabandhu Avenue in the city demanding an international inquiry into the attack and trial of the perpetrators.

Baffled, they gave up on justice

BISHAWJIT DAS

The August 21 grenade attacks in 2004 took away bread-earners of several families while scores of others became crippled, lost their eyesight or born grenade splinters never to be got out.

The fact that none of the perpetrators are yet to be brought before justice even two years after the gory incident only adds to their anguish.

"The government did not even show any sincerity to make a fair probe into the attack, let alone do justice," grumbled Mamun, son of a grenade attack victim Ada Chacha (Rafiqul Islam), a favourite among AL activists.

"There is no hope that this government will bring the perpetrators to book," he said.

"We are fine. Thank you for at least asking which the government did not bother to ask," was the reply of Ada Chhacha's daughter Maya when asked how they were doing.

She also thanked The Daily Star for running a story on the family last year, which focused on her younger brother Pallab who stopped his studies at North South University (NSU) after his father's death. Following publication of the story, the NSU authorities waived his tuition, enabling him to continue studies there.

But not everyone could say 'we are fine' as Maya did. The August 21 blast orphaned two sons of Sufia Begum, widowed Bashir Ahmed, made two-year-old Al Amin fatherless.



The road in front of Muktagong in the capital remains closed for five days as a faction of Islami Oikya Jote demanding recognition of Quami madrasas holds a sit-in programme there creating gridlocks in the surrounding area.

AL won't accept updated voter list: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina said her party would not accept the updated voter list prepared by the present Election Commission (EC) as it violated High Court (HC) directives. She said the present 'politicised' EC cannot create an accurate voter list.

"As the EC had resorted to forgery in updating voter list by violating the HC verdict on preparing a fresh voter list, it will not be able to prepare a genuine voter list at all," Hasina, also the Leader of the Opposition, said after the field-level task of updating the voters list ended yesterday.

Lebanon truce may unravel, says UN

Annan blames Israel for violating truce

REUTERS, Beirut

The United Nations said on Sunday the week-old truce between Israel and Hezbollah could easily collapse, a day after it condemned an Israeli raid on the guerrillas in Lebanon as a violation.

Senior UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen said the truce that halted the 34-day war had provided the Lebanese government with a good chance to extend its authority over all of the country.

"We also do believe that unfortunately there is a tilting edge where things very easily, within the next weeks or months, can slide out of control," Roed-Larsen told reporters in Beirut.

"This is why it's so important that all parties concerned exercise utmost restraint in this situation in order to give the Lebanese army the possibility of deploying fully along all borders of Lebanon, and particularly in the south, and also to allow the international community to provide troops."

A 30,000-strong force is envisaged for south Lebanon, made up of Lebanese and UN troops in equal number.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said on Saturday Israel's commando raid on a Hezbollah stronghold deep inside Lebanon had violated the truce that came into effect on August 14.

Israel said the operation, in which commandos were airlifted

B Chy, Kamal may launch new alliance Wednesday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Following in the footsteps of the BNP and Awami League, some small political parties are going to kick off an alliance-- the Juktafont (United Front)-- on Wednesday.

Led by former president Badruddoza Chowdhury and Dr Kamal Hossain, the lightweights in local politics moved to forge an alliance last week and came close to finalising their declaration, sources said.

Leaders are trying hard to bring the parties disillusioned with the BNP-led 4-party alliance under the

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Shahjahan looks beyond silver

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Shahjahan Ali Rony might have to be content with a silver medal in the men's 100m breaststroke here yesterday, but the BKSP swimmer kept his hopes alive to strike gold in the shorter distance event later at the 10th South Asian Games.

The 19-year-old, who is gearing up for the 50m breaststroke on August 23, showed signs of lifting his favourite event by leading the pack in the 100m dash until the 70m mark at the Sugathadasa

AUG 21 ATTACK Hasina says govt didn't carry out proper probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government did not carry out proper investigation to bring persons responsible for the August 21, 2004 grenade attack to justice after repeated demands from both

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