

US ANNOUNCES \$2.4B
SALE OF COASTAL
DEFENSE SYSTEMS TO
TAIWAN
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The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

www.thedailystar.net

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RABUL AWAL 10, 1442 HIJRI

16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00



Clear, yet not seen

Questionable DB raid caught on CCTV;
probes go nowhere in 4 years as officers
responsible face no action



MUNTAKIM SAAD

The CCTV camera of Hotel Bondhu captured it all.

Its footage shows a group of men in civilian clothes handcuffing hotel manager Hasan Majumdar and chef Sohel Rana.

Before leaving with the two, a member of the team was seen gesturing for a hotel staffer apparently to turn off the CCTV camera and it was complied with.

The previous footage, however, remained.

The two detainees, who were taken on a microbus to the DB office on Minto Road from the hotel in the capital's Paltan, said those men were plainclothes officials from the Detective Branch.

It was on November 6, 2016.

At least 20 people at the market told The Daily Star that they witnessed the incident that day. This newspaper has also obtained and reviewed the CCTV footage.

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TARGET FOREX RESERVE

Orion Group desperate to manage loan from
restricted forex coffer; experts ring alarm

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The burgeoning forex reserve, now hovering around \$40 billion, is turning a lot of heads, alarmingly though, as big borrowers shift their eyes from exhausted public banks to the secured coffers.

Orion Group is the first business conglomerate to make an official dig at the reserve for a \$906.17 million (Tk 7,684.32 crore) loan to set up a coal-fired power plant, a development seen by experts as risky, uncertain and beyond the existing practice.

Though a loan has never been given to a private company from forex reserve for implementing a project, the state-owned Rupali Bank, through which the group made the move, and Bangladesh Bank primarily entertained the proposal.

"It's highly risky, and under no circumstances this should be allowed," Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, a respected banker and former deputy governor of the central bank, told The Daily Star.

"Both the central bank and the government should consider the issue with the utmost importance."

Named Orion Power Unit-2 Dhaka Ltd, the coal-fired plant is to be set up on the bank of Meghna River (near Meghna Bridge in Gazaria upazila, Munshiganj) for generating 700 megawatt of electricity.

The conglomerate has proposed to shore up only 20 percent of the \$1,138.43 million (Tk9,653.88 crore, \$1 =Tk 84.80) project from its own sources, hoping the remaining 80pc will come from the forex reserve, according to Rupali Bank documents prepared following the Orion Group proposal on July 26.

This newspaper has obtained a copy of the documents.

Prominent economist Professor Anu Muhammad thinks that the attempt to use the forex reserve for setting up a dirtyenergy plant should be treated as a criminal act.

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DESPERATE STEPS

JULY 26: Orion Group applied to Rupali Bank for a loan from forex reserves

AUG 13: Rupali considered the proposal positively at its board meeting. Bangladesh Bank observer for Rupali opposed it

AUG 19: Rupali sent a letter to BB with a positive response to the proposal, ignoring the observer's opinion

AUG 31: BB accepted the proposal and asked Rupali to submit a detailed plan

SEP 30: Rupali backtracked from its previous decision. It decided not to take any financial responsibility, but to act as a dealing bank for managing the fund

OCT 6: Orion promptly moved to Agrani Bank, submits the same application to it

OCT 19: After a meeting, Agrani asked Orion to submit a detailed proposal

OCT 20 ONWARDS: Agrani is preparing to forward the case to its board, BB

Safeguard it

Noted personalities warn govt against loan-seekers

Noted experts have cautioned the government against giving loans to any business entity from the forex reserve, saying that such a move would be highly risky and go against public interest.

KHONDKAR IBRAHIM KHALED

Ex-deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank

The central bank should not allow any private company to take a loan from the foreign exchange reserve under any circumstances, observed Khaled.

"Giving a private company loans from the foreign exchange reserve is highly risky," he said.

If the company fails to pay back the loan on time, Bangladesh Bank will face big

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Bangladesh-India flights to resume from today

RASHIDUL HASAN

Air communication between Bangladesh and India resumes today after a seven-month suspension due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, India is yet to respond to Bangladesh's proposal for resuming road and rail communications considering the majority of the country's people use those two modes to travel to and from the neighbouring country, sources at the foreign ministry said.

"We have agreed with the Indian proposal to resume air communication [under an air bubble agreement] between the two countries. But we have also proposed that India open the road and rail links, as most of our people travel to India through these modes," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star recently.

"We have stressed on the resumption of road communication... But they are yet to give us any clear idea about it," he said.

According to Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation, India has created an air travel agreement with Bangladesh, effective from today. This agreement is valid till January 31.

In order to travel between the two

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ERFAN SALIM

Building on father's murky legacy

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

After Monday's arrest of Erfan Salim, son of Awami League leader Haji Md Salim, law enforcers have unearthed tales of his lavish lifestyle, which included 12 bodyguards and 30 to 40 young men at his beck and call.

Erfan, councillor of Ward-30 under Dhaka South City Corporation, took over the throne of Haji Salim, lawmaker of Dhaka-7, after he fell sick in 2018.

Speaking to The Daily Star, law enforcers, who interrogated Erfan Salim and one of his bodyguards Zahidul Islam, disclosed details of his luxurious lifestyle. They also found a personal surveillance network that included close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras and smuggled walkie-talkies that Erfan used to monitor his business empire.

Erfan first appointed 12 bodyguards and also had a team of around 30 to 40 men, who were a constant presence in his nine-story-building -- Chan Sarder Dada Bari -- at Debidasbat Lane in Chawkbazar.

When appointing bodyguards, Erfan -- also son-in-law of an MP from Noakhali -- chose only those who hailed from Gopalganj district and who, in his eyes, had a "smart outlook".

When going about on his Land Rover, Erfan was usually accompanied by three or four bodyguards, who were suspected to have been carrying illegal firearms.

Like a special security force, these body guards also carried a special briefcase and handcuffs.

A RISE BACKED BY HIS FATHER

According to sources, AL-backed candidate Haji Mohammad Hasan Pillu -- who is a nephew of Haji Salim -- was the DNCC Ward-30 councillor.



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RIFAT MURDER CASE Children's court jails 11, acquits 3

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A Barguna court yesterday sentenced 11 juveniles to different jail terms in the much-talked-about Rifat Sharif murder case.

It also acquitted three other juveniles of their crime.

Of the 11, six were awarded 10 years of imprisonment, four were awarded five years each and one was awarded three years.

Barguna Children's Court Judge Md Hafizur Rahman delivered the verdict from 1:00pm to 2:45pm, with all 14 accused present in court after they were brought in from Barguna jail in the morning.

Of 75 witnesses, 74 testified against the 14 juveniles in court, sources said.

After delivering the verdict, Barguna Children's Court Public Prosecutor

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As part of our ongoing series of interviews of political party leaders, today we are running the interview of Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Md Shah Alam. It will be followed by Oikya National Awami Party President Pankaj Bhattacharya.

All democratic institutions destroyed

Says CPB General Secy Shah Alam

GOLAM MORTOZA

Md Shah Alam has been the general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) since May 2017. He has been involved with politics since he was a student and played a key role during the mass upsurge in 1969. The valiant freedom fighter was the commander of the joint guerrilla force of NAP-Communist Party-Student Union during the 1971 Liberation War. Recently, he spoke to The Daily Star about the country's politics and other contemporary issues.

The Daily Star (DS): Many people have been confused about CPB's political stance. What is your reaction to that?

Shah Alam (SA): Our party has come this far with a long history, tradition and glory. You all know about our role during the Liberation War. I think there is no reason to be confused about CPB's political stance.



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MYANMAR ELECTIONS UN decries discrimination against the minorities

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN has expressed serious concerns over the human rights violations, including the right to political participation of minority groups such as the Rohingyas and Rakhines, ahead of the general elections in Myanmar on November 8.

While the elections represent an important milestone in Myanmar's democratic transition, the civic space is still marred by continuing restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information, it said in a statement yesterday.

"Myanmar's discriminatory citizenship and electoral laws confer different sets of political rights to different classes of citizens, affecting most clearly the Muslim minorities who are largely

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COVID-19 UPDATE 20 more die, 1,335 test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty people died from Covid-19 in the country in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of deaths from the virus to 5,838.

The death rate is 1.45 percent of all confirmed cases in the country, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

A total of 12,617 samples were tested during the same 24-hour period and 1,335 of them tested positive. The positivity rate was 10.58 percent.

With the latest detections, the total number of coronavirus cases in the country rose to 401,586. The total positivity rate now stands at 17.58 percent.

Bangladesh is currently in 18th position in the list of Covid-19 affected countries in the world in terms of most number of cases, according to the worldometers.info.

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Police transport detainees in a pick-up truck without following health safety guidelines. Such transportation of suspects put them and law enforcers at risk of contracting the novel coronavirus. The photo was taken at Kakrail intersection in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

US stands with India to deal with any threat

Says Pompeo in New Delhi as pact to share sensitive satellite and map data signed

STAR REPORT

Amid Indo-China border tensions, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo yesterday declared that Washington stands with New Delhi to deal with any threat as the two countries tightened their mutual strategic embrace by signing a pact to share sensitive satellite and map data.

Pompeo, who arrived in New Delhi on Monday along with Defense Secretary Mark Esper, said after talks with their Indian counterparts that the two countries had to work together to confront the threat China posed to security and freedom.

The annual US-India strategic dialogue comes at a time of heightened tension in the region, with Indian troops confronting Chinese forces on their disputed Himalayan border.

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which gives India access to classified geo-spatial data as well as critical information having significant military applications from the US, was signed as Pompeo and Esper held hourlong in-person talks with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for the third edition of the 2+2 talks in New Delhi, reports our correspondent in New Delhi.

Emerging from the talks and BECA signing, which came a week before US presidential elections, Pompeo, in a joint

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