

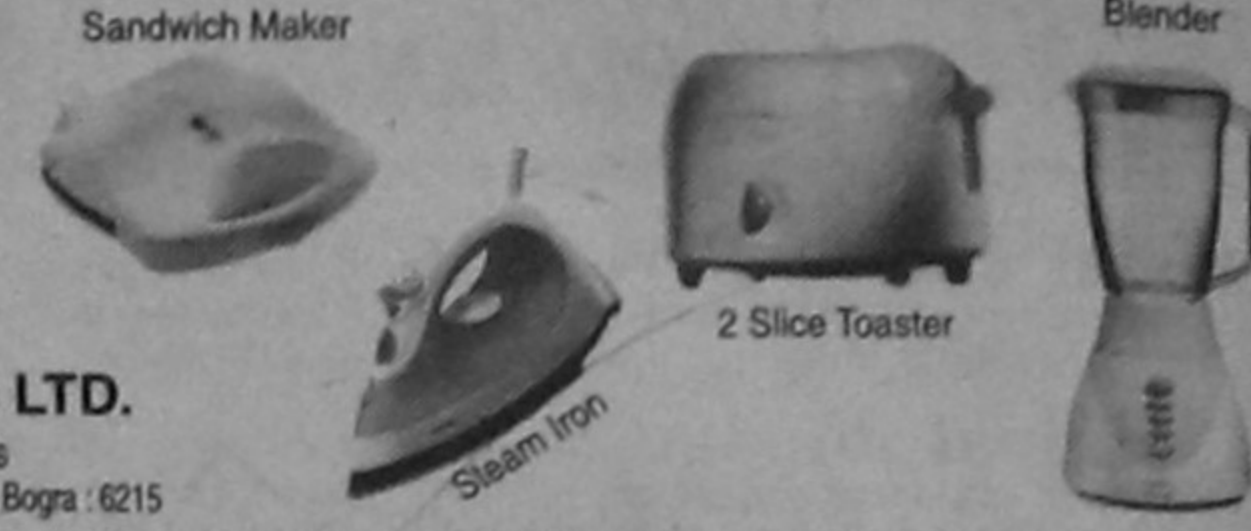
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Proposed Haripur power plant Contradictory evaluation threatens credibility of bidding process

Star Report

Contradictory evaluation of bidders by the Power Development Board (PDB) and the project consultant, Mott MacDonald, for construction of the Haripur 109 MW power plant has jeopardised credibility of the bidding process, sources said.

A tender committee of PDB recently technically qualified one of the three bidders, which was earlier disqualified by Mott MacDonald. It has also disqualified the "best bidder", selected by the consultant.

The sources said PDB's selected bidder was backed by a close relative of a top PDB official and the consultant's selected bidder was backed by a former minister of the present government. The consultant reportedly had business relations with the former minister.

"In both selections, anybody can raise the question of fairness," commented a source.

"Besides, the whole process looks like an arranged bidding in which one or another Japanese firm would participate and get the work."

A PDB official however denied charges of "fixed bidding" and said it is a standard practice that Japanese companies would participate in Japanese funded projects.

PDB will open on June 3 the offers of three Japanese power companies bidding for the project. These companies are Mitsubishi, Mitsui-Kawasaki and Marubeni.

PDB closed bidding for the Japan financed power project in December last year. The Japanese JBIC set some of the technical criteria for selection.

MacDonald took several months to evaluate the technical qualification of the three companies. In March, it told PDB that it found Mitsubishi 'qualified', but Marubeni and

Mitsui-Kawasaki 'non-responsive'. Later, PDB's Tender Committee-1 ignored MacDonald's evaluation, went for its own evaluation and selected Mitsui-Kawasaki.

Earlier, MacDonald's role was questioned for issuing a 'take-over certificate' to the site developer for the Meghnaghat power project on behalf of PDB without its prior approval.

MacDonald's action had triggered a severe rift between AES, the contractor for the Meghnaghat project and PDB which had long been disagreeing over the quality of the site development work.

The Energy Ministry earlier this month asked the PDB whether any action was taken against MacDonald for its 'irresponsible action'. Till now, no action has been taken against it, the sources said.



Leaders and workers of the four-party opposition alliance brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting 'unilateral' appointment of M A Syed as CEC. —Star photo

Opposition playing a dubious role: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday criticised the opposition's "dubious role" and accused them of pursuing the politics of hypocrisy, reports UNB.

"While the government is trying hard to strengthen the democratic process, the opposition parties are out to destroy it," she said at a meeting with the chairmen of parliamentary standing committee at her office.

Sheikh Hasina said the BNP leader tells one thing in public meeting but does another. There is no consistency in her word and action, she added.

After the 1991 election, she said, her Awami League, as the opposition party, took all initiatives for restoring democratic process and put pressure on the government to restore parliamentary system of democracy.

The Prime Minister said Awami League has established parliamentary form of government as it was the party's election pledge.

She said after the 1996 election Awami League formed the government and made Parliament the centre of all activities for strengthening democracy and ensuring accountability and transparency.

For ensuring transparency, the ruling party has made MPs the chairmen of Parliamentary Standing Committees instead of ministers, she said, adding under new system the activities of different ministries are being run properly.

Hasina said, "We wanted to form a government on the basis of consensus, but the opposition did not cooperate."

She said her government

wanted to give the post of the Deputy Speaker to the opposition. "We even wanted to include opposition members in the cabinet," she added.

"GDP rate was over 5 pc in last three years," she said, adding that the rate is expected to cross six per cent this year.

She said for massive programmes in the agriculture sector the country has got four consecutive bumper crops and there is a stock of 15 lakh tons of foodgrains.

Turning to infrastructure development, she said during the last two decades 4500 km roads were constructed, while the present government constructed 3500-km roads only in three years.

She said with the opening of Bangabandhu bridge a scope has been created to set up agro-based industries in the northern region.

By growing more vegetables and agricultural products in the North Bengal the country can export those to the European markets, she said and suggested export of more frozen fish and processed foods to EU markets.

The chairmen of the Parliamentary Standing Committee congratulated the Prime Minister for appointing a Chief Election Commissioner an discussed various issues for further strengthening of democracy.

Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Prime Minister's Advisor on Parliamentary Affairs Suranjit Sengupta and chairmen of the standing committees on different ministries attended the meeting.

Sweden formulating strategy to promote democracy in Bangladesh

Sweden is formulating a new strategy for development cooperation with Bangladesh to promote democracy and democratic culture, a Swedish minister said in Dhaka yesterday, reports UNB.

Calling on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office, Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation, Migration and Asylum Affairs Ms Malin Klingvall said she came here as part of the initiative to formulate the strategy through mutual interactions.

Klingvall suggested exchange of parliamentarians between the two countries for consolidating the democratic culture. "Since you are dedicated to democratic values, such exchanges will bring good to the two countries," Klingvall said.

The Swedish Minister appreciated Bangladesh's programmes for poverty alleviation and empowerment of women.

The Prime Minister said the government had worked hard for restoration of democracy and people's rights to vote as all elections in the past were rigged and people had no right to exercise their franchise freely.

She pointed out that since the parties in power previously had no root in the masses and originated from the cantonment, they did not care for democracy or democratic culture.

12th prosecution witness in Rubel Murder Case cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Ashrafuzzaman, the 12th prosecution witness in the Rubel Murder Case was cross-examined in the third additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

Judge Mollah Mostafa Kamal adjourned the proceedings of the case till today.

Zaman said in his statement that he watched Rubel being tortured by the DB police on 23 July, 1998.

He also said that the magistrate made inquest report in front of him. The stick, used to beat Rubel, was identified by Ashrafuzzaman.

Shamim Reza Rubel, 24, a BBA student of the Independent University was picked up by a team of DB police on his Siddeswari residence on July 23, 1998 and was tortured to death in DB custody the same day.

The ten of the 14 charged accused, including AC Akram Hossain and Mukul Begum were produced in the court yesterday. The rest four have been absconding since the incident.

"We have made the parliament the focal point of all activities and introduced Prime Minister's question time and parliamentary standing committee system headed by MPs instead of ministers to ensure accountability and transparency."

Referring to women's empowerment, she told the Swedish Minister that her government had taken adequate measures facilitating over 45,000 women to contest the union parishad elections of whom 14,000 were elected.

Officials said the Swedish government has set five objectives for development cooperation with Bangladesh including economic growth, sustainable use of natural resources and protection of environment.

35 injured as villagers clash in Magura

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, May 23: At least 35 people were injured ten of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups of villagers at village Dairpol in Sreepur upazila this morning.

Police and local people said, two rival groups — one led by Akhtar Hossain and the other by Boni Ismil — clashed over establishing supremacy in the village.

Both the groups used iron rods and sticks during the clash.

The seriously injured, identified as Mohammad Ali, 35, Hasan, 38, Shimul, 23, Mashur, 28, Shariful, 27, Pappu, 30, Turan, 30, Suruj, 35, Babu, 30 and Obaidul, 30 were admitted to Magura Sadar Hospital.

Four Shibir activists held in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, May 23: Four Shibir activists were arrested by Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) during the past 24 hours ending at 6 pm today, reports BSS.

The Shibir activists are Nazrul alias Enam, 26, Abul Hossain alias Hussain, 29, Shawkatul Alam, 28, and Anwar Hossain, 28. They were arrested on charges of terrorism, hijacking, kidnapping, killing and toll collection, police said.

Cases have been filed against them under the relevant sections.

Other police stations of CMP rounded up 27 miscreants on various charges.

Body recovered from manpower office in city

By Staff Correspondent

Police yesterday recovered body of an unidentified person from the office of a manpower recruiting agency in the Dikusha Commercial area yesterday afternoon.

Police could not be sure whether it was a case of murder or suicide. Body of the victim was found hanging from a ceiling fan of the office, witnesses said.

None was present at the office when police recovered the body, said police and witnesses. The main gate of the office was closed from outside, police said.

The body was recovered at around 2 pm from the office on the ninth floor of Jiban Bima Sadan, Motijheel police said.

Rickshawpuller stabbed by extortionists dies at DMCH

By Staff Correspondent

Lebu Miah, 15, who was stabbed by a gang of extortionists at East Kazi Bari under Kafrul police station on Monday, succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

The gang stabbed Lebu, a rickshawpuller, when he demanded fare from three passengers, witnesses said.

In the FIR, two local hoodlums — Rubel and Jashim — have been accused of stabbing the victim, said Kafrul police.

Police could not arrest the two till filing of this report last night.

Purulia arms-drop Subid Ali denies involvement

By Staff Correspondent

Maj General (Rtd) Subid Ali Bhuiyan yesterday denied his involvement in the Purulia arms-dropping and demanded publication of the CID investigation report, reports UNB.

"The investigation report by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) should be made public as the image of the army as well as the country is involved," he said at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club.

Subid Ali Bhuiyan, the then PSO to former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, came in the spotlight when an Indian daily, The Independent, reported in 1996 that the "end-user certificate" for the "arms consignment" was signed by Bhuiyan. Purulia is in West Bengal.

The same report also said that the end-user certificate also could have been forged using fake signature and seal of the general.

Referring to his duty as PSO and the system of signing End User Certificate Bhuiyan said a vested quarter was hatching conspiracy against him.

"All the papers which I signed as PSO are preserved," he told newsmen.

He said while CID officials went to his office to talk to him about the matter, "I required some necessary papers but our office did not supply."

"Still I cannot realise the motive of dilly-dallying in serving the papers necessary for CID investigation."

Referring to a recent verdict by the Indian high court about the Purulia arms-drop case, where the court said Bangladesh had no involvement in the incident, Bhuiyan said a group was trying to implicate him in the incident.

When asked whether he would run in the next general elections, the retired army officer said: "Of course I will contest, but wait and see when and which party I will join."

Speakers at roundtable warn Growing trade deficit may endanger ties with India

Bangladesh's existing friendly relationship with India may be endangered due to growing trade deficit, cautioned speakers at a roundtable in the city yesterday, says UNB.

Expressing apprehension they said, "the growing deficit to the disadvantage of Bangladesh has been causing tension and creating a feeling of distrust among the people."

Bangladesh-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BICCI) organised the roundtable on "Trade and Investment" at a local hotel.

A galaxy of business leaders from both the countries including experts, economists and academics took part in the roundtable.

BICCI is a common platform of the apex trade bodies of Bangladesh and India — the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

"Bangladesh can't sustain the huge deficit for long. It is causing a serious impact on growth and employment," Food Minister Amir Hossain Anu said while inaugurating the

meeting. He said it would be in the interest of Indian economy to increase imports from Bangladesh and help growth of Bangladesh for maintaining high level of their exports.

"We must transform the present one-sided dependence on India into a mutual dependence to the advantage of both India and Bangladesh," he said.

Bangladesh's trade deficit with India increased at an annual rate of 33 per cent during the period from 1990 to 1998.

Meanwhile, its imports from India was growing at an annual rate of over 30 per cent in 1990s, while its import remained stagnant throughout or even declined in real terms.

"It's not because that we don't have products to export to India, but because our products do not have access to Indian market due to certain tariff and non-tariff barriers," said BICCI chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo, who is also the president of FBCCI.

Speakers noted with dismay the delay in allowing duty-free access of the 25 Bangladeshi items into India, which was agreed upon more than a year ago. The Indian attitude has

frustrated the businessmen as well as the people of Bangladesh.

Mintoo further said the tariff barriers have been reduced or eliminated for as many as 2014 Bangladeshi products under three rounds of SAPTA negotiation. But actual implementation at the ground level has not yet taken place.

Besides, non-tariff barriers like canalisation and rules of origin are also obstructing access of Bangladeshi products to Indian market, he added.

To promote business with India, the FBCCI chief said, Bangladesh entrepreneurs need to set up business offices, banks and other service organisations at important locations in India.

"But India doesn't allow them to set up such offices or units," he regretted.

The BICCI chairman Mintoo said Bangladeshi products could not enter into the Indian market for lack of infrastructure and service facilities at the Indian side of the land ports such as access roads, bank branches, customs offices etc.

"India should improve the infrastructure facilities to facilitate trade," he said.

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Muktijoddha Sangsad held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday demanding immediate execution of verdict in the Bangabandhu murder case. —Star photo

Syed takes oath as CEC

From page 1

would seek Opposition co-operation in discharging my responsibilities neutrally."

Asked whether he was going to take steps to hold Upazila Parishad elections, the CEC said it would depend on the preparation of the Commission.

The CEC went to the Election Commission Secretariat at 2:30 pm and stayed there for about two and a half hours.

He received briefing from his colleagues on EC's on-going projects including preparation of a national electoral roll and voters ID card. Feasibility of holding Upazila polls also came up for discussion but there was no decision on the issue.

The commissioners also briefed him on a pending case relating to the parliamentary membership of Jatiya Party chief H M Ershad, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

Top EC officials were present during the discussion.

UNB adds: The officials informed the new CEC that the upazila election was already over due, but the opposition parties were opposed to any local body polls before the parliamentary election.

Meeting sources said the new CEC only listened to the Elec-

FFs demand Execute verdict in Bangabandhu murder case

By DU Correspondent

Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad (Freedom Fighters' Council) in a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of Dhaka yesterday demanded immediate execution of the verdict in the Bangabandhu murder case.

It also demanded that the killers of Bangabandhu be immediately brought back to the country. It threatened a vigorous movement of the freedom fighters if the trial is delayed further.

Different units of the Sangsad assembled at the Kendriya (central) Shaheed Minar in the afternoon for a rally, which was addressed among others by political adviser to the prime minister Dr S A Malek, minister for Fisheries and Livestock A S M Abdur Rab, principal Abdur Ahad Chowdhury, Sultan Uddin Ahmed and general secretary of Muktijoddha Command Council Abdur Rashid.

Dr Malek said a certain quarter was creating political

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Manju smells mystery

By Staff Correspondent

Anwar Hossain Manju, communications minister and secretary general of a Jatiya Party faction, believes there is a mystery behind the political parties' failure to reach a consensus on the appointment of the new chief election commissioner.

"The people have to unveil the mystery as to why the parties concerned could not reach a consensus on the CEC issue, especially when the main contenders wanted to choose a person on the basis of discussion," Manju told the Daily Star while giving his reaction to the appointment of the new CEC.

However, he refused to elaborate.

"It is learnt that the president has chosen one as CEC from a list of candidates suggested by the prime minister. I think all concerned will accept the new CEC," he said. "A constitutional post such as the one of chief election commissioner cannot remain vacant for indefinite period."

Replying to another query, Manju said, "There is no binding that the next general elections has to be held under the new chief election commissioner."

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Industrialist Nooruddin Ahmed dead

Noted industrialist and former president of FBCCI, DCCI and Dhaka Club Nooruddin Ahmed died yesterday morning at Cardio-hope Hospital at Banani in the city. He was 69, reports BSS.

Ahmed was suffering from various complications.

He left two sons, one daughter and a host of friends and well-wishers in the business circle to mourn his death.

The namaz-e-Janaza of Nooruddin Ahmed was held after Asr prayers at Banani Mosque yesterday. He was buried at Banani graveyard.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep shock at the death of Nooruddin Ahmed.

In a condolence message the Prime Minister praised late Nooruddin an amiable and straightforward personality. In his death, the country suffered an irreparable loss, she said.

The Prime Minister conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

Late Nooruddin is elder brother of Awami League Working Committee members Raziuddin Ahmed MP and eldest son of opposition leader of the then East Pakistan Provincial Assembly late Afsar Uddin Ahmed.

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