

DAP projects zapped

Govt braces for Japanese ire to protect nat'l interest

SHAHRIRI KARIM and RAZIUR RAHMAN

Protection of national interest reigned over concern for deterioration of relations with the largest bilateral donor as the government cancelled two di-ammonia phosphate (DAP) fertiliser projects on Chinese and Japanese suppliers' credit.

The Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) informed the Japanese and Chinese contractors of the decision on August 17.

The policymakers finally opted for the decision, convinced that the projects would have put a huge financial burden on the country, sources said.

The Japanese were not happy and said it could have an adverse impact on business relations between the two countries.

The fertiliser projects - Tk 392.97 crore DAP-1 and Tk 451.70 crore DAP-2 - were undertaken last year on Chinese and Japanese suppliers' credit.

Had authorities gone for implementation of the projects, production cost of fertiliser would have been Tk 12,374 per metric tonne (MT) at the DAP-1 and Tk 12,228 per MT at the DAP-2. Import cost of di-ammonia phosphate fertiliser is Tk 10,440 per MT.

Earlier on August 8, Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Jiro Kobayashi wrote to Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman that his government "is concerned that the cancellation of the project will affect

adversely business relations" between the two countries.

"As a result of the cancellation of the project, when the claim for compensation regarding the project is submitted to the government of Japan from the Japanese contractors and the insurance is paid, it is highly probable that the Japanese government will take an action to stop accepting new export and insurance regarding business activities with Bangladesh," the Japanese ambassador wrote.

In the first week of January, the Ministry of Industries prepared a proposal to cancel the project. However, the decision was delayed by a long time in the face of strong lobbying by a quarter, sources said.

"Due to the delay in decision making, we have to pay more as compensation to the contractors," said a government source.

On July 17, the issue was raised at a meeting of the cabinet committee on economic affairs. However, the committee could not take any decision although all members but one were for immediate cancellation of the projects.

According to sources, one influential minister got in the way of the committee making any decision at the meeting.

Earlier, Saifur said the government had not approved the two DAP fertiliser projects as "we thought it might create a situation like KAFCO's and a huge burden on the country".



PHOTO: STAR

Police yesterday arrested Mohammad Ripon (right), who Monday night allegedly strangled Rubel Ahmed Don, photographed in his mother's lap (left), in the city's Mir Hazirbagh area under the Demra Police Station.



Charge-sheet in Bappi murder case today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The charge sheet in the sensational Rubayet Ahmed Bappi murder case will be submitted to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, today, police sources said.

Bappi, a student of class III of Armanitola Government High School, was abducted by his cousin Shipon on August 5 and taken to Demra area.

Failing to realise a ransom of Tk 20 lakh from Bappi's father, Shipon and his four accomplices - Ripon, Sankar, Sanjit and Sharif - strangled the child and dumped the body into the river Shitalakhyia the same evening.

The decomposed body of Bappi was recovered from the river after 10 days of massive search.

Police has so far arrested Shipon, Ripon Sankar, Jahid, Rafiqul Alam and Hena Begum. Another accused, Sharif, is at large.

Killers of Bappi won't be spared, PM assures parents

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said speedy trial of Bappi murder case would be held and killers punished in accordance with law to check recurrence of such tragic incident.

Her assurance came when parents of Rubayet Ahmed Bappi met the Prime Minister at her office.

Ruksana Begum, mother of Bappi, embraced Khaleda and burst into tears.

Khaleda assured the weeping mother that the killers would not be spared and her government is serious in bringing the culprits to the dock. She said offenders have already been arrested.

Bappi, a student of class III of Armanitola Govt High School, was abducted from Becharam Dewri for ransom and killed on August 5.

Bappi's mother Ruksana and father Alfu Mia thanked the Prime Minister.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Aug 21	4-30	6-29 pm
Aug 22	5-35 am	

Prayer Timings		
August 21		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zahr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-34	6-39
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Schoolgirl abducted, rescued at Rugganj

Angry locals keep city road under siege for 3 hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police rescued a Class X girl of a city school three hours after her abduction from the Badda area by six local youths.

Thousands of angry locals, students and teachers of the school put up barricades on the Kuril-Badda Biswa Road as a police sub-inspector who was informed about the abduction minutes after the incident allegedly did not take any initiative to catch the abductors.

The barricade was later withdrawn as the police became active

following the widespread protest and rescued the girl. Police also arrested six abductors including Zahiruddin, 26, Iqbal, 25, Badal and Sumon from Rugganj who were taking the girl with them on the microbus.

After the rescue and arrest, Badda police mysteriously remained tightlipped about the whole affair. Despite repeated requests, they refused to give out information about the whereabouts of the girl and her abductors.

The girl aged around 16 was abducted in front of her school at

around 11:00am while she was going to her school to sit for exams. The abductors, one of them a relative of the girl, suddenly came in a microbus and dragged her in. They sped away within seconds as the girl cried for help, witnesses said.

The locals who heard the girl screaming informed a police sub-inspector, Moklesur Rahman, about the abduction and requested him to chase the car. But the police officer told the people to contact the police station, witnesses said.

This enraged the locals and they

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PHOTO: STAR

Sher-e-Bangla Ideal School students along with local people shout slogans as they barricade the Kuril-Badda Biswa Road yesterday in protest at police indifference that delayed rescue of one of their fellows.

Banks asked to freeze Agarwal's accounts

RAFIQ HASAN

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday asked all commercial banks to freeze accounts of Marwari businessman Om Prakash Agarwal.

The tax authorities wrote the managing directors of 37 commercial banks to identify accounts of Agarwal and freeze them, according to sources.

The letter was issued from the income tax zone-5 following the NBR directive.

The income tax authorities also formed a five-member investigation team headed by a deputy tax commissioner to gather information about it.

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DENGUE ALERT

Late wake up call

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In its latest resource mobilisation, the government has allocated 100 beds exclusively to dengue patients at Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital and assigned six doctors and 30 nurses.

But the hospital has no reagents or devices to confirm dengue symptoms, and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is soon to run out of its 15,000-litre insecticide in stock.

Only Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) has a cells separator to make platelet which is the only remedy when the patient with dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) loses blood.

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BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Khasru lashes out at Moudud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru has accused his successor Moudud Ahmed of issuing untrue, cleverly phrased, self-contradictory and misleading statement about the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

Reacting sharply to Moudud's comments made to the press on Monday, Khasru said the government was not appointing an ad-hoc judge at the Supreme Court on one hand and blaming the lawyers on the other.

"It's the jurisdiction of the president to appoint a judge on ad-hoc basis, but the president cannot do it without consulting the prime minister. Therefore, the prime responsibility of appointing such a judge mainly lies with the government," the former law minister said in a statement yesterday.

Referring to Moudud's remarks about the chief justice's recommendation, Khasru reminded that immediate-past chief justice Mahmudul Ameen Chowdhury made a written proposal for an ad-

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Gas tariff hike from Sept 1

STAR REPORT

The government has taken initiatives to increase gas tariffs for different sectors. The new rates will be made effective from September 1.

The energy ministry is finalising a proposal to fix new gas tariff and the proposal will be sent to the prime minister for approval, according to sources. Last time, gas price was increased in January.

Meantime, the government has increased power tariff from August 1.

When contacted, State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain said the initiative is to rationalise gas price for different sectors.

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Rejoinder and our reply

Alamgir Md Mahfuzullah Farid MP of Maheshkhali and Kutubdia in a rejoinder yesterday protested a news item published in The Daily Star on August 9 under the caption "Shrimp lords destroy coastal mangrove; local BNP MP's men fell trees, expose Sonadia island to tidal wave".

The MP denied the allegation that he and his men or relatives are involved in chopping down mangroves to convert areas in Sonadia or any other place in Maheshkhali into shrimp compartments.

"I am elected member of parliament for two terms from Maheshkhali/Kutubdia (Cox's Bazar-2) constituency. A politically motivated rival group is active against me. It (the group) is always trying to tarnish my political career, social goodwill, honour and respect."

"The reporters interviewed the TNO of Maheshkhali but did not take my statement," the rejoinder

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5-yr-old strangled for 'dowry' in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A five-and-a-half-year-old boy was strangled allegedly by his brother-in-law at Mir Hazirbagh under the Demra Police Station on Monday night.

Police said Mohammad Ripon took the boy, Rubel Ahmed Don, to the area, promising him a bicycle ride and strangled him. Later, he dumped the body into a drain.

With the latest killing, three children have been killed in the city in a span of only 14 days. Earlier, five-year-old Ratna was slaughtered at Sabujbagh on August 10, four days after the killing of eight-year-

old Rubaiyet Ahmed Bappi.

According to police and family members, Don's mother Rubi Begum came to her sister's residence at No.1 Dhalpur to attend a family function. Don lived with his aunt since he was one-and-a-half-year-old.

At noon, Rubi Begum along with her sister and other family members went to Ripon's house at 17, KM Das Lane. At about 5:00pm, Ripon took his bicycle and went out with Don.

"Many saw them going out with Don on the backseat of the bicycle," said Rubi Begum.

"It was 8:00pm and neither Ripon nor Don returned," the mother said

in tears. "I searched for my son but did not find him anywhere."

Ripon's mother Gul Nahar tried to calm down a worried Rubi and said, "Don't worry about him. He is with my son and will be back soon."

Rubi Begum got a shock when she saw Ripon coming back alone at about 8:30pm. "We asked him about Don, but he said he knew nothing about him. He even denied taking Don out."

"I don't know when he got off my bicycle," Rubi Begum quoted Ripon as saying.

At one stage, Ripon got irritated and shouted at Don's mother, "I

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Pebbles in rice found at Kurigram granary

ANWAR ALI, from Kurigram

The district administration of Kurigram has detected pebble-mixed rice in a government granary in Nageshwari Upazila and sealed two rice-loaded sacks for further investigation.

The district administration sources claimed that the suppliers, in connivance with some food officials, mixed pebbles.

"I don't say the rice was of low quality, but there were pebble-mixed rice....we collected rice samples and requested the district controller of food (DCF) to look into the matter", said Mezbahul Alam, the deputy commissioner (DC) of Kurigram who also visited the granary.

Talking to this correspondent over telephone, Quazi Nurul Islam,

the DCF, who inspected the Nageshwari local supply depot (LSD) on Thursday, however, told that pebbles in rice sacks are common and in this case 'very negligible' in terms of quantity.

"Besides, mixing pebbles would not be cost-effective for businessmen because pebbles sell at higher price than rice", the DCF added. When contacted, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Nageshwari, Atiqur Rahman said the pebble-mixed rice was first detected during the distribution of rice among flood victims under the relief programme.

Rahman said, "We just acted on a complaint of Baramandanga Union Parishad chairman Mainul Haq Prodan that the pebble-mixed rice was being distributed among his local people...and the chairman also informed us that the rice sacks had

the seals of Ahad Rice Mill."

In a raid on the Nageshwari LSD, the district administration officials found two sacks of rice, supplied by the Ahad Rice Mill, contaminated with pebbles. Several food officials, including the upazila controller of food, were also present during the raid.

"There were large pebbles mixed in the rice and we sealed them off...such pebbles will not escape anybody's attention", the UNO said. In this season, about 10,004 metric tons of rice was procured against the target of 13,614 metric tons. Local rice millers, certified by the food department, usually supply rice to the granaries, official sources said.

Local people alleged that this year the millers bribed the food officials between Tk 1,000 and Tk 1,200 for getting allocation for supplying rice.

Govt opts for mid-course

12,500 two-stroke polluters to go off street on Sept 1: 5,500 to stay till Dec 31

RAZIUR RAHMAN

Under pressure, the government has once again given concession to two-stroke polluters by allowing 5,500 vehicles to ply until December 31, the deadline set by the High Court.

However, on the flip side, some 12,500 two-stroke three-wheelers out of the total 18,000 will be grounded from September 1.

As per the agreement signed yesterday between the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and the Dhaka Auto-Tempo, Auto-Rickshaw, Auto-Truck Malik-Sramik Oikya Parishad, 5,000 two-stroke auto-rickshaws launched in 1995-96 and another 500 launched in 1996-97 will ply until December 31.

These vehicles have to tag special BRTA stickers on windshields from September 1. Besides, the body of every vehicle will be painted white with a yellow stripe.

Sources said the government had to backtrack on the previous decision due to inadequate preparations of the communications ministry for

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PHOTO: STAR

Students parade down city roads in a colourful procession the environment and forest ministry organised yesterday to drum up supports for the ban on two-stroke three-wheelers from September 1.