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AES plans sellout of two power plants

SHARIER KHAN

AES Corporation may soon strike a deal to sell the Meghnaghat 450MW and Haripur 360MW power projects to CDC Globeleq, a British government-owned company, sources said.

Although as per contract the US power company cannot sell more than 49 per cent of its shares of the projects in the first eight years of commercial operation, it is pursuing the deal to raise funds for its cash-strapped global operations.

The financially strong Globeleq does not have the experience of running large-scale power plants, as it was formed about a year ago, the sources said.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that AES has agreed to sell the projects at a heavy discount.

Contacted, the AES Bangladesh office declined to comment on the issue. Project Manager of both Haripur and Meghnaghat plants Dale Sinkler did not want to talk at all despite repeated efforts.

The deal will be signed soon if

the ongoing negotiations between Globeleq and AES representatives become successful, sources said.

The AES Meghnaghat 450MW project has begun commercial operation only one month ago and the Haripur 360MW has been operating for a little over a year.

In apparent deviation of the clause on the sale of its shares, AES and Globeleq agreed that Globeleq would buy 100 per cent of AES' equity in both the projects.

The Globeleq negotiators have visited the city in November and

have met the high officials of the Power Division and the Power Development Board (PDB), besides visiting the AES project sites.

When PDB officials raised the contractual issue, the Globeleq representatives have reportedly said that they were trying to get the contract clause waived.

When Globeleq was formed, it recruited executives of Coastal Power. Robert Hart, Globeleq chief executive officer (CEO), and Arun Sen, chief operating officer (COO),

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20 army men disciplined, says govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday admitted that departmental action has been taken against about 20 army personnel for various offences during the ongoing Operation Clean Heart.

However, the punitive actions have no relation with the "so-called custodial deaths", Principal Information Officer Khandkar Manirul Alam said at a press briefing.

The actions have been taken for wrongdoing, overdoing and negligence of duty. This is a routine affair in the defence forces, the PIO said.

"The press reports regarding punitive actions are partially correct", he said.

Colonel Nazrul Islam of ISPR said

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Dhaka, Beijing may sign defence, trade deals

PM leaves for China today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia leaves Dhaka for Beijing this morning on a five-day official visit to China.

The trip is expected to yield a number of agreements on economic and defence cooperation between the two countries.

Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday that Dhaka and Beijing are expected to sign some agreements, memoranda of understanding and exchange of letters during the PM's visit, which he described as very significant.

"An umbrella agreement is necessary to intensify the existing defence cooperation," he said about the planned defence deal between the two countries.

Briefing the newsmen at the foreign ministry about the PM's China visit, Shamsheer said the planned defence accord would help rationalise and institutionalise the existing piecemeal agreements to enhance cooperation in training, maintenance and manufacturing of some products.

"It would strictly be a bilateral cooperation agreement and not

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Commentary

Why are our writers and journalists still in prison?

MAHFUZ ANAM

We are glad that Pricilla Raj is out, but only on bail. However, it must be regrettably mentioned here that it took five days for the High Court order to be implemented. This we think was a gross and deliberate miscarriage of justice as a result of which Pricilla was kept in prison for five additional days. Will our government kindly explain how it could take five days for the jail authorities to receive the High Court order when both are located within less than five kilometres of each other? We recall how the ETV verdict was implemented within hours of its delivery. Here it took five days and that also because of proactive moves by lawyers and family



Muntasir Mamun

Shahriar Kabir

Saleem Samad

members of the defendant. Given the process of "law taking its own course" - a phrase our law minister loves to quote - God only knows when the High Court order would have reached the Dhaka Central Jail and when Pricilla would have breathed the blessed air of freedom.

If "justice delayed is justice denied", then justice has been denied to Pricilla for at least FIVE DAYS (we are not even talking of her detention since November 25 and claim of electric shocks to e x t r a c t

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Life draped in fog

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the second consecutive day, heavy fog slowed down communication across the country.

Landing and take off of all the scheduled flights were delayed, and the movement of transports of every kind was badly affected.

The Met Office, however, said the fog that descended on the country and also this region was nothing unusual. "This is normal during this time of winter. We are expecting that the situation will improve in the next two or three days," said Qumrul Hasan, forecasting officer at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

The arrival and departure schedules of all the international and domestic flights to and from Dhaka were delayed by three to sixteen hours yesterday, as none could land or take off before 11:22am, airport sources said.

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PHOTO: STAR

A truck on a city road blazes headlights yesterday morning to fight its way through dense fog that has blanketed roads and rivers across the country over the last couple of days.

Test fee skimming scam DMC dissolves central students union

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Medical College has dissolved its central students union.

"The academic council has disbanded the Dhaka Medical College Students Union (DMCSU) as its one-year tenure already expired," Dr Tofail Ahmed, principal of the college, said yesterday afternoon after chairing an emergency meeting of the council.

Dr Tofail refused to draw any link

between the decision and the rampage by the DMCSU leaders on the college premises on Saturday.

"The DMCSU election was held on November 14 last year and the students union's tenure was due to expire on the same date this year. I was tied up with other official businesses and could not dissolve the union on that day," he said.

However, according to college sources, Saturday's incident prompted the academic council to

dissolve the students union, which had been pressing the authorities to increase price of application forms for admission test.

The union also called for an indefinite strike, demanding immediate resignation of the principal and two other teachers. The principal, who goes on a ten-day leave today for "personal reasons", was also declared unwanted on the campus.

According to sources, the students union, led by Javed and Noman, demanded that the authorities raise the price of admission forms to Tk 100 from Tk 20 and that it be given Tk 80 for each form.

"Last year, the leaders collected a huge amount of money from admission seekers the same way," said a DMC student.

Meanwhile, no classes or examinations were held at the DMC yesterday due to an indefinite strike called by the union-backed "All Doctors and Students of the DMC".

Some JCD activists brought out a procession on the college premises

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Passport renewal fees to go down by half

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has decided to reduce renewal fees for different categories of passport by around 50 per cent.

According to sources, a statutory regulatory order in this regard will be issued soon. The Ministry of Finance has already approved a revised renewal fee structure.

In the revised structure, fee for urgent renewal of an international passport has been fixed at Tk 500, down from Tk 1,000. The normal renewal fee has also been slashed to Tk 300 from Tk 500.

In case of a special passport (applicable for India), urgent renewal would cost Tk 300, down from Tk 500, and normal renewal Tk 150, half of what it is now.

Those who want to have their passports renewed overseas would have to pay \$25 and \$15 for urgent and normal delivery respectively. At present, urgent renewal costs \$50. For renewal of special passport, the charges w o r d

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Awami League counts down for a council of change

NAZRUL ISLAM

The main opposition Awami League is all set to hold its triennial central council on Thursday amid party men's strong hopes that it would give birth to a new leadership combining old and youth.

The council is also expected to adopt a number of proposals to amend the party constitution and change its manifesto.

"We have almost completed all preparations and will sit for a meeting today to work out the rest," AL presidium member Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star last night. The pro-

posed amendments and changes are being discussed for long.

The council will be held at Paltan Maidan in the city.

The council is likely to bring about changes in the half-a-century-old political party's organisational structure and amend its constitution to make it more vibrant.

This time around various sub-committees of the party's council preparatory committee have come up with these proposals to put those at the central conference.

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) sits for a crucial meeting today to dis-

cuss a number of proposals, according to party insiders.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 3:00pm at the Bangabandhu Avenue central office of the party. It is likely to continue till Thursday.

According to the proposals, the party would adopt in its constitution a provision for a 'council of advisors' for the party. Now, the party president has a 15-member advisory council.

The number of presidium members and secretarial posts would be

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Pricilla freed, at last

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

NGO worker Pricilla Raj was freed from the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday evening after the High Court bail order reached the jail authorities.

A High Court bench granted her bail on December 18, but she was not released till yesterday as the bail order did not reach the authorities.

"The allegations against me are baseless. I worked as an interpreter for the two foreign journalists for two days and nothing more," Pricilla told the BBC radio yesterday after her release.

"The police repeatedly pressurised me to be the approver of the prosecution side in the sedition case against the foreign newsmen," she added. "During the police remand, I was subjected to inhuman treatment. I was given electric shocks and was tortured both mentally and physically. Police also denied my

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