

450MW RPC PLANT 'SCAM'

# German financier to initiate int'l audit

SHARIER KHAN

Responding to allegations of corruption in the 450 mw Savar power project of the Rural Power Company (RPC), the project's German financier KfW in a primary probe report has stated it will commission an audit by an internationally reputed firm within a few weeks.

The audit will look into issues relating to the contract awarding, pricing and appropriateness of various contracts involving the power project.

The Daily Star on January 10 carried a report on the project that contained allegations of serious tender manipulations to favour a certain company.

In its February 18 probe report submitted to the government, KfW said the audit will also cover the financial relationship between the RPC and Palli Bidyut Samities (PBS).

"First preliminary findings indicate that the draft PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) and draft O&M (operation and maintenance) contract for DNPP (Dhaka North Power Project) will have to

be modified to comply with internationally accepted standards," it said.

The Daily Star report said the RPC floated the tender a few months ago for Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract for the first phase of the 450 mw DNPP and the contract terms bar participation of any EPC contractors.

The first phase will generate 280 mw power at a cost of 150 million euros. The Daily Star reported KfW is providing 40 million euros as

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# Essentials prices up again

Soyabean oil, milk powder, pulses turn dearer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prices of some essentials including soyabean oil, milk powder, flour and pulses rose Tk 6 to 8 a kg in the city markets last week.

Some spices like dried chilli, ginger and garlic also rose steeply during the time.

A two-kilogram packet of *atta* was selling at Tk 35-36 last week against Tk 28-30 a week ago. A kilogram of pulses, especially

*masur*, was selling at Tk 48-50 compared to Tk 42-44 of the previous week. A tin of powdered milk weighing a kilogram was selling between Tk 230 and 235, which was Tk 225 in the previous week.

In the city's Mohammedpur City Corporation Market, a litre of soyabean oil was selling at Tk 68 against Tk 58-60 two weeks ago.

"The prices of Kwality and Diploma packed powdered milk and of flour and soyabean oil shot up in the last two weeks and the prices of Dano milk powder are

likely to shot up as the suppliers informed us about the price hike effective from next week," said Mohammed Rashid, a grocer at the Mohammedpur City Corporation Market.

In the city's Hatirpul kitchen market, a kilo of local dried chilli was selling at Tk 100 against Tk 95 of the previous week, a kilo of local garlic was being sold at Tk 60, up from Tk 55, and a kilo of ginger at Tk 60 against Tk 50 before two weeks.

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## SSC exams from Mar 4

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations, Dakhil and SSC Vocational examinations will begin on Thursday under the country's nine education boards.

Examinees found with 'copies' will have to face summary trial under the Public Examination Act, 1980. Helicopters will remain ready to fly the education ministry officials to anywhere cheating is reported.

A total of 9,73,958 examinees will appear at 1,723 centres all over the country for the SSC, Dakhil and SSC Vocational examinations.

Of them, 7,61,960 will appear in the SSC examinations under the seven education boards, 1,80,546 in the Dakhil examinations under the Madrassah Education Board and 31,452 in the SSC Vocational examinations under the Technical

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## UPDF, PCJSS trade fire over supremacy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Activists of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) locked in sporadic gun-fights at Ramgarh in last two days over establishing supremacy in the area.

Although paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and local sources confirmed Sunday's gun-fight, the BDR denied yesterday's clash at UPDF-controlled bordering village of Kalapuru.

The gunfight between the pro-peace accord PCJSS and its opposition sparked at 3:00pm Sunday when armed PCJSS members opened fire on Kalapuru villagers.

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# When lioness takes a village stroll



PHOTO: STAR

### IN A DASH FOR FREEDOM

A lioness, bottom, clawed her way out of the cage at Dhaka zoo, top, yesterday to a nearby village in Mirpur until zookeepers and police tranquillised it into submission.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

She took a swim in the lake, a walk through the village and then sat under a tree to enjoy her just-earned freedom.

She might have wondered why people are shutting down doors on her in frenzied fear.

But then she did not have much time to think. Zip. And a tranquillizing dart shot her to unconsciousness. Lioness Monisha's brief one and a half hours morning sojourn ended at 7:30am yesterday.

Monisha sent a chill down the spines of the people at Mirpur when she succeeded in an escape breaking her cage in the zoo yesterday morning at 6:00.

Alarm spread through Mirpur when zoo officials told residents about the lioness' escape and warned them to be on guard.

However, people got relieved, as the lioness couldn't sustain her freedom for long. She got very scared seeing the people trying to catch her and swam through the lake behind the zoo and reached the village on the other side. There she was seen sitting under a tree in a garden of a house. Soon with the help of police and tranquilliser the zoo authorities caught her.

"The lioness fled to a house adjacent to the zoo and we used two darts to tranquillise it," said Syed Ali Ahsan, veterinary officer of Dhaka Zoo.

Zookeepers found the lioness already fled while her mate lion Bengal was still struggling to get out of the cage when they went to give them breakfast.

Md. Mafizur Rahman, curator of the zoo, said the lioness could flee because the cage in the Dhaka Zoo became very old, rusty making the grilles very fragile.



PHOTO: STAR

The reconstruction of Gulshan 2 roundabout leads to rush-hour traffic jam on the busy road.

## US arms experts team in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A three-member US weapons experts team reached the port city yesterday to see the sophisticated firearms seized recently from different parts of Chittagong.

The team called at the office of Mahbubur Rahman, superintendent of police, Chittagong, in the afternoon and inspected recently recovered M-79, M-16 and AK-47 assault rifles and huge ammunition.

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Prayer Timings		
March 2		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-07	6-12
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

# 80pc capital sewage dumped into rivers

SATFF CORRESPONDENT

About 80 percent sewage in the capital is released untreated in rivers flowing by the capital and if the trend continues sewage will virtually replace water in the rivers within a few years.

Participants expressed this concern at a discussion on "Urbanisation and Environment" in the capital yesterday.

They said only 20 percent sewage is released after treatment and that Dhaka needs a waste and sewage disposal plant on an emergency basis. Otherwise, the capital will be the second most polluted city in the world in 2015,

one participant said.

State Minister for Housing and Public Works Alamgir Kabir was the chief guest at the discussion organised by Coalition of Local NGOs, Bangladesh (CLNB) and held at the Jatiya Press Club.

Kabir said civilisation originated near the rivers and Bangladesh is known to the world as a riverine country. But there is an unhealthy trend of illegally grabbing rivers, canals, lakes and other water bodies, hastening their destruction.

He stressed a public agitation to protect environment.

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## PSC for end to quota system in govt jobs

UNB, Dhaka

The Public Service Commission (PSC) placed its recommendation for revoking quota system in government jobs before President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday.

Submitting its annual report for the year 2003 to the president at Bangabhaban, PSC members asked the government to abolish quota system for appointment in vacant government positions.

PSC Chairperson Prof Zinnatunnesa Tahmida Begum presented the report to the president while other commission members were also present, said a Bangabhaban press release.

They apprised the president of PSC's activities during the last one year and rejected allegations of question paper leakage of last year's Bangladesh Civil Service examinations.

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## Opposition whip rebuts army rule breach

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Whip Faruq Khan yesterday dismissed as false an army allegation of cantonment rules breach against Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and 25 others.

The retired lieutenant colonel, a co-accused in the case Dhaka Cantonment Board filed on Sunday charging the 26 of the main opposition party and its front organisations with violating the cantonment act, also rejected as untrue a statement of Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, who represents the defence ministry in parliament.

Hafiz told the House on Sunday Hasina led a procession and tried to provoke army personnel Saturday night on her way to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) where prominent writer Humayun Azad is being treated for critical head and jaw wounds.

AL's counter-statement came at a press briefing at the Sangsad Bhaban, also attended by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid and Opposition Chief Whip

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## CELLPHONE

# JS body formed to suggest tariff cut

'Call charge highest in the world'

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary body yesterday rated the cellphone call charge as highest in the world and formed a sub-committee to recommend cuts in rates in an effort to protect subscribers' interest.

"The cellphone call charge in India is only 40 paisa a minute, but it is up to Tk 7 in Bangladesh, as private mobile phone operators have a monopoly here," said GM Fazlul Haque, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on telecommunications ministry.

"We want to fix reasonable rates that will apply to all private operators," Haque told The Daily Star after a meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban.

The Jatiya Sangsad body expressed concern at the delay in launching the much-talked-about BTB (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) mobile phone service, believed to cut the monopoly of private operators.

The three-member sub-

committee, headed by ruling BNP lawmaker Kazi Golam Morshed, was asked to submit its report soon to pave the way for reducing call charges. The standing committee will forward a recommendation to the government for low call charges after it gets the report from the sub-committee.

"We will sit with Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and private operators to decide reasonable charges. We will give subscribers' interest priority," Morshed said.

He accused the cellphone service providers of burdening users with high rates, adding: "They (companies) appeal to the government for more facilities but are depriving subscribers of low-cost service."

The standing committee sent a letter to the Public Purchase Committee on February 14 to review the February decision on suspending

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## Noise pollution causes hearing impairment

Speakers say at a seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday said noise pollution is one of the major causes behind hearing impairment and other related diseases.

Society for Assistance to Hearing Impaired Children (SAHIC) organised the seminar on "Hearing Disability: Role of the Government, Civil Society and International Community" for working out ways for prevention, early detection and rehabilitation of hearing impaired, especially in children.

Prof Nurul Amin of the SAHIC in his keynote speech said, "Noise pollution in industries, traffic movement, loud speakers, band music and other sources must be reduced to a tolerable level through effective implementation of proper legislation for prevention against hearing impairment."

He said at least nine million people in Bangladesh, who constitute 8 percent of the country's total population, are affected with hearing-related diseases.

With advancement in science and technology, 95 per cent of

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PHOTO: AFP

Best Actress Charlize Theron, left, poses with her trophy at the 76th Academy Awards ceremony yesterday at the Kodak Theater in Hollywood, CA. Actor Sean Penn accepts his award for Best Actor for his performance in "Mystic River".

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# Lord of the Oscars

REUTERS, Los Angeles

The film trilogy about the One powerful ring now rules the film world.

"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" won a record-tying 11 Academy Awards on Sunday, including best film -- succeeding after attempts at Oscar's top prize by the first two films in the series had failed.

Charlize Theron, holding back tears, claimed the Oscar for best actress for her portrayal as a female serial killer in "Monster", and Sean Penn took home the golden statue for best actor in murder thriller "Mystic River".

Both acting victories had been largely expected by Oscar watchers, as was the best film win by "Return of the King", leaving award show watchers with only few surprises. The show itself had little of the flair it had shown in recent years, with several unexpected Oscar winners like last year's Adrien Brody or Halle