

Concrete pole syndicate makes Tk 1100cr in 5 yrs

SHARIER KHAN

A syndicate of 13 concrete pole manufacturers through bid manipulation and political influence sold to the Rural Electrification Board (REB) 15 lakh overpriced concrete electric poles worth Tk 1,100 crore between 2001 and July 2006.

Insider sources said this syndicate sold another two lakh poles to the REB on record. But these poles cannot be found in reality.

By controlling pole prices, the syndicate made the REB pay double the actual price of the poles. In many cases, the REB paid three times the price of the poles, the sources said.

From November last, the REB has stopped purchase of concrete poles and power distribution procurements with local funds. The caretaker government (CG)

had asked it to stop expansion of power distribution due to a huge demand and supply shortfall.

Because of a massive expansion of distribution network in the last five years, the REB's client base doubled from 3 million to 6 million, and demand for power from 1,000 megawatt to 2,000 MW. But as the then government had failed to install new power plants during the period, it was able to supply only 700 MW to 1200 MW power, and thus created widespread dissatisfaction among the consumers.

Besides, the REB could take the decision regarding concrete poles as external pressure to award contracts had significantly declined.

"As a result of stoppage of all procurements with local funds, REB's utilisation of the annual development programme (ADP) funds remained stagnant at a

disappointing 37 percent till December," said an official.

The government had allocated about Tk 500 crore in local currency to the REB under the ADP with Tk 400 crore of it for poles procurement.

"REB has decided to revise the ADP (relating to it) and reduce its size. But we will try to utilise the foreign exchange components," the official added.

He pointed out that Khamba, a pole manufacturing company set up by Hawa Bhaban leaders including Ghasuddin Mamun, was all set to win a tender in October-November last when the REB decided to re-tender it because of gross irregularities in Khamba's bid.

Sources said that in the last five years till 2006, the REB installed power distribution lines of 75,000

km almost entirely with 15 lakh concrete poles. Prior to that the REB installed 1,35,000 km lines using 17 lakh wooden poles and another few lakhs of concrete poles. Under pressure from the concrete pole syndicate, the REB stopped purchasing any wooden poles in 2003 and opted for costlier and low quality concrete poles.

The installation cost difference between concrete and wooden poles per km is significant. For instance, in fiscal 2004-05, the REB spent around Tk 250 crore to buy four lakh concrete poles for construction of 16,700 km distribution lines. If wooden poles were used, the same job could have been done with half the number of poles by spending around only Tk 75 crore to Tk 85 crore.

Each wooden pole has double

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Devotees say Jum'a prayers on the bank of the Turag yesterday, the first day of Biswa Ijtema there.

PHOTO: STAR

Lakhs join Ijtema

WASIM BIN HABIB WITH MASUM BILLAH

The three-day Biswa Ijtema, the second largest Muslim gathering after Hajj, started yesterday on the bank of the Turag in the suburban town of Tongi amid the participation of a large number of devotees from home and abroad.

Locals claim the number of devotees gathered there this year surpasses the number of devotees that gathered at Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers) last year.

Several lakh devotees thronged the Ijtema ground since early yesterday morning from different places across the country to offer their Jum'a prayers turning the area around 20km off the capital into a human sea.

Maulana Qwari Zohayer, Imam of Kakrail Mosque, led the prayers with rows of worshippers spilling out of the 160-acre Ijtema ground which was covered by a gigantic canopy.

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Nazmul Huda threatens Star Editor

In response to a report carried by The Daily Star, BNP leader Barrister Nazmul Huda yesterday issued a press statement. Full text of the statement signed by Khandoker Erfan Biplob, public relations officer of Huda, is as follows:

Former Communication Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda has strongly protested against the news published in "The Daily Star" on February 2 under the heading "Graft allegations against Huda, Mamoon to be probed."

In a statement issued to the press Barrister Huda warned The Daily Star Editor Mr. Mahfuz Anam of legal action for compensation and damages for continuously publishing libelous statement against him despite the fact that in an unambiguous term he refuted the allegation raised against him several times before.

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Mamun yet to be handed over to police or court

Tale of his quick rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained businessman and Tarique Rahman's business partner Ghasuddin Al-Mamun was neither produced before any court nor handed over to police as of last evening.

Mamun was arrested at a rented flat of his friend Monir Hossain Lito at Naya Paltan on Wednesday following a lead from one Russell caught by intelligence officials as he went to a Motijheel bank with a cheque of Tk 50 lakh.

Lito and two others were also detained along with Mamun.

Residents of the apartment at 38 Naya Paltan confirmed yesterday that members of Rapid Action

Battalion (Rab) and intelligence agencies raided flat-504 and arrested Mamun.

However, the Rab or other agencies have not yet made any official confirmation about Mamun's arrest, but sources said members of an intelligence agency are now interrogating him.

Meanwhile, family members of Monir, owner of Jonaki International Hotel and a contractor by profession, left the flat soon after the arrest.

"We allowed Mamun to stay in our house as law enforcers did not publish any photograph of Mamun describing him as wanted," a flat owner quoted Lito's wife as saying.

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RU teacher stabbed, hospitalised

RU CORRESPONDENT

Armed activists reportedly belonging to Islami Chhatra Shibir stabbed a newly recruited teacher of the law department of Rajshahi University (RU) severely on Thursday night for "refusing to join the party".

The victim, Abdul Alim, 35, was rushed to Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital with several stab injuries.

Sources said a group of 10 armed assailants swooped on Alim at Binodpur bazar near the university at 9:30pm as he was on his way home from the teachers' club.

Locals rushed to the scene hearing Alim's scream and rescued him while the attackers fled.

Alim, his relatives and colleagues told reporters that Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, might have orchestrated the attack as Alim refused to join their party.

Sources said many teachers

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ACC likely to be empowered to seize property, give detention

Govt assessing steps against corrupt people

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Intent on curbing the menace of corruption, the interim government is thinking of different actions including empowering the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to place the ones charged with graft on a month's detention and seize their property before trial.

A seven-member advisory council committee on anti-corruption formed on January 24 will discuss and analyse a number of other options as well. It will identify the existing legal, administrative and institutional inadequacies in rooting out corruption.

The government has asked it to place recommendations to that end before the chief adviser within two weeks.

The inaugural meeting of the committee will be held tomorrow at the law ministry with Law

Adviser Barrister Mainul Hossain in the chair. Meantime, members of the committee are doing their homework, said sources.

The ACC has already drafted a set of proposals and will place those to the law adviser tomorrow, ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

They have discussed different aspects of corruption with Barrister Mainul on a couple of occasions, he added.

The anti-graft body will suggest that the government promulgate an ordinance bringing amendments to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004 so that the graft cases can be disposed of within 270 days.

Justice Sultan said they are setting forth the proposals to the caretaker government with a view to ensuring speedy disposal of the

cases. Currently, there is no time bar for those to be settled.

The Special Powers Act 1974 has long been criticised by different socio-political organisations. Political parties on different occasions undertook to repeal the repressive law but while in power they blithely ignored the pledge.

Interestingly, now the ACC is contemplating incorporating in the existing anti-corruption law the 30-day detention provision of the Special Powers Act.

If the provision is added in it, the ACC Act will provide for a month's detention without trial for the ones with corruption allegations against them.

According to the proposal, a district magistrate will order the confinement following recommendation of the ACC.

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Graft case filed against Orion Group chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finally, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed a graft case against Orion Group chief Obaidul Karim in connection with embezzlement of around Tk 6.7 crore from the principal branch of the Oriental Bank at Motijheel.

The case was filed with Motijheel Police Station on Thursday night, accusing Karim and three others. In the FIR (first information report), Karim has been identified as chairman of Belhassa and Associates.

Three other accused, who are also officials of the Oriental Bank, are Shah Md Haroon, senior vice-president, Md Fazlur Rahman, assistant vice-president and AQ Mahmud Ullah, senior assistant vice-president.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan told The Daily Star yesterday that official concerned filed the case on Thursday night following commission's approval

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Passenger buses wait in queue as ferry service at Daulatdia comes to a halt for nine hours due to dense fog, creating one kilometre-long tailback yesterday.

Huge quantities of fertiliser, cement, commodities seized

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Army in a further intensified drive against adulteration and hoarding recovered over 4.5 lakh sacks of fertilisers and 45 thousand sacks of soda and poultry feed worth around Tk 103 crore in Chittagong port city yesterday, reports our staff correspondent from Chittagong.

Police also seized 130 sacks of adulterated powdered chili and a huge quantity of chemical dyes and husk from three spice grinding shops at Khatunganj in the port city yesterday.

The security personnel made the huge recovery busting nine warehouses including seven belonging to Jilani Enterprise at Majhirhat of Sadarghat under the city's Double Mooring thana.

During the drive that started at around 3:00pm, the army recov-

ered 1.5 lakh sacks of TSP, 75 thousand sacks of FMT, 75 thousand sacks of MOP, 150 sacks of Urea fertiliser and 1.5 lakh sacks of damaged fertilisers, kept possibly for mixing with the good ones.

Thirty five thousand sacks of soda and 10 thousand sacks of poultry feeds were also among the recovered items.

The army arrested Jilani Enterprise employees Md Noor Hossain, and Asim Das, 26, -- both hailing from Patuakhali, for their involvement in the hoarding and adulteration.

Acting on the confession of shop owner Abdul Matin and his employee Zia who were arrested on Thursday night, Kotoali police in Chittagong made an anti-adulteration drive at Nabi Market of Khatunganj in the port city yesterday.

They recovered 130 sacks of

adulterated powdered chili, a huge quantity of chemical dyes and husk to be used in adulteration from three shops belonging to Matin, Swapan and Hanif at around 10:00am.

Swapan and Hanif, however, managed to escape arrest.

The army and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in separate drives on Thursday seized over 1.50 lakh sacks of TSP and Urea, and arrested two persons from four warehouses of the same area along the northern bank of Karnaphuli river.

UNB from Munshiganj adds: the joint forces, yesterday seized about 2 lakh sacks of adulterated cement from a cement factory at Tentutala in Gazaria upazila.

During the drive, they also arrested 10 employees of the factory.

The joint forces raided Anwar

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DENSE FOG Vehicles stranded, ferries and flights disrupted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dense fog in the last two days disrupted vehicle movements, ferry services and river communications in most parts of the country, causing untold sufferings to the passengers.

The flight enquiry at Zia International Airport said they were compelled to rearrange the schedule for a number of international and domestic flights due to dense fog. Even hours after day-break, vehicles were seen plying the roads with fog lights on in and out of the capital.

Thousands of passengers, including Biswa Ijtema-bound devotees, had to wait the whole night on both sides of the Padma and the Jamuna as ferry services remained disrupted for dense fog for nine hours.

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Altaf's aide, BCL central leader held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint forces arrested the personal assistant to former commerce minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury in Patuakhali, a pro-Awami League (BCL) central committee member in Chuadanga, and seized four firearms busting a college at Jatrabari in the capital in the last 24 hours, ending at 6:00pm yesterday.

Members of the army, police and Rab yesterday also arrested 1,623 people on various charges and seized 30 firearms.

Of the arrestees, 150 were held by the army, while the rest by police and Rab. Army personnel seized 10 firearms and police and Rab seized the remaining 20, said a home ministry official.

Police said the joint forces yesterday raided the house of Altaf's personal assistant Hasibul

1,623 arrested, 30 firearms seized in countrywide raids

Gani Monir Khandaker at Kathaltoli in Mirzaganj upazila and arrested him, our Patuakhali correspondent reported.

Besides, the joint forces detained 14 others in different upazilas of the district as part of the ongoing drive.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-2 members raided RK Chowdhury Degree College at Sayedabad in the capital late Thursday night following a secret information and seized four firearms --one revolver, one self loading rifle (SLR) and two 303 rifles. They also seized three bullets from the spot.

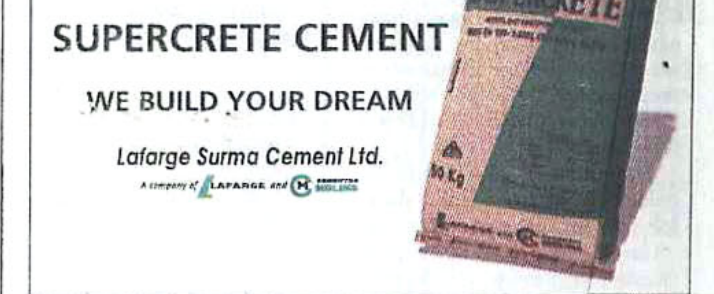
The Rab men arrested four people--Mohammad Monsur, Mizanur Rahman alias Ripon, Lito Kazi and Mizanur Rahman

--on charges of possessing the firearms.

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: Army men arrested Fazlul Haq Fazlu, brother of Dharmapur

BNP general secretary Rafiqul Islam at his house yesterday noon and recovered two firearms and 19 bullets from there.

On Thursday night, the joint forces arrested BCL central committee member Tanzir Ahmed Rony and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal Darshana Degree College unit general secretary Selim Mahfuz.



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