

3 power projects

FROM PAGE 1
that Harbin bid around 15 percent project cost.

The Daily Star in a report last year showed that Harbin had hidden about \$16 million cost in Chandpur power project. The then alliance government had approved Harbin's flawed bid for this project strongly arguing that its bid offer is \$45 million as against \$51 million of its Chinese competitor CMEC.

The caretaker government formed a committee to scrutinise the Harbin deal. The committee cleared this deal as it largely depended on information given by the same PDB officials who helped Harbin bag the deal. The committee however strongly suggested that the project cost cannot be increased and it should be strictly monitored.

The PDB set June 11 for signing the final agreement with Harbin. But at the last minute, the Chinese company in a letter refused to sign the deal. It said the contract was supposed to be signed one year ago. And the bid validity expired one year ago. Harbin also said it would withdraw the performance guarantee of Tk 30 crore that was issued against the project.

The PDB then asked Harbin to sign the deal. But the company argued that the plant and equipment price had gone up globally in the last one year. It would only sign the deal if the PDB agreed to increase the cost to \$65 million.

As the PDB cannot do this, it wrote to the power ministry for a decision. The ministry then sought the law minister's guidance in this regard.

"If we go for re-tender now, it will kill about 8 to 10 months. Besides, the project cost would increase by about 20 million dollars," said an official.

The government should have scrapped the Harbin deal long ago. It had no practical experience in installing power plants, excepting the Tongi plant (which is highly flawed). If we must spend more money, we should not sign a deal with a company that was blacklisted by a government agency (Eastern Refinery Ltd) for failing to commission a small 3 MW plant," said a power expert.

Harbin is also implementing 90 MW Fenchugan power project under a contract that was signed in mid-2005 with a 10 percent down payment amounting to Tk 52 crore made to Harbin in violation of government norms. But the company has suspended implementation of the project due to tax related complications.

Sources said the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has imposed huge tax on Harbin against the project. This tax was previously exempted illegally through a government order issued under the influence of ex-finance minister Saifur Rahman's son.

"The PDB has requested the NBR to resolve the matter as soon as possible. This is the only power project under implementation now," a PDB official said.

Contract for the Fenchugan combined cycle power project was awarded to Harbin in its fifth round of re-tender. Interestingly, the PDB had disqualified Harbin as a bidder for this project in the third round tender in 2002, when this company

EC plans

FROM PAGE 1
express their opinion on the proposed electoral reforms, he added.

The immediate past EC led by Justice MA Aziz had invited 116 political parties including a large number of organisations in name only to a dialogue on the preparation of the voter list in 2005. Excepting the then ruling four parties including the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, most of the major political parties boycotted the series of discussions that turned out to be a complete farce.

A huge number of political parties regularly contest the parliamentary elections, but most of them fail to win a seat.

In 1973, only 14 parties participated in the country's first parliamentary polls but the number rose to 81 in 1996. Fifty-five parties contested the last general election that took place in 2001.

Now the EC with ATM Shamsul Huda at the helm wants to keep the political parties that exist only on paper out of the parliamentary election by introducing mandatory registration.

Election Commissioner Sakhawat said the commission wants to hold a meaningful dialogue with the political parties on electoral reforms.

"The talks with a large number of little-known parties cannot produce good results. So, we have plans to use some criteria for those wanting to be holding the dialogue," Sakhawat told The Daily Star.

Besides, the EC has drafted an application form that will be distributed among the political parties that are not fit for registration but still want to be a part of the discussion. The form would seek information about their organisational strength and other relevant matters so the commission could decide on who should be allowed and who not, sources said.

On timetable for the talks, Sakhawat said they are waiting for the ban on indoor politics to go. "We will start the dialogue once the political parties are ready to take part in," he said.

made its first successful entry into Bangladesh's power sector by bagging the Tongi project using Hava Bhaban's influence.

Harbin bagged the bid by making an offer at Tk 524 crore. In the previous tender, Japanese company Sumitomo had made an offer of Tk 500 crore but the bid was cancelled after it withdrew from the bidding alleging the PDB had sided with Harbin.

Meanwhile, Obaidul Karim's shell company BON Consortium that failed to meet its May 28 deadline for financial closure of the 450 MW Meghnaghat-2 project has been offered deadline extension by amending the relevant contract.

The PDB on June 11 told BON to submit \$10 million performance security and then get a specific deadline for financial closure.

But on June 23, BON proposed December 31 as deadline for financial closure and August 25 as deadline for submitting performance security.

In response, the PDB said BON must furnish the security deposit by July 15 and then fix the financial closure.

"The problem with BON is that it has no reputed financial institution backing it up. The PDB is giving options to BON based on its May 27 request, accompanied by a letter of B a h r i n - b a s e d C a p i t a l Management House (CMH). We never heard of any CMH in the power sector financing," said a power expert.

PDB's experts had repeatedly expressed doubts about BON's capability to implement the project, saying the earliest the government scraps the BON deal and goes for a re-tender, the better it is for the nation.

The BON Consortium failed to meet its May 28 deadline for financial closure, blaming "political instability" in the country. On May 27, it requested the government to allow it an additional seven and a half months' time for financial closure.

BON is comprised of UAE's Belhsa, Obaidul's Orion Power and German company Steag, which is the leader of the consortium. But Steag has never been visible in Bangladesh.

Apparently, Belhsa group is the only visible "moneyed" partner. But Belhsa is not a power plant developer and its website does not even mention any Bangladeshi project.

Actually BON never made the bid that was selected for this power project, and it just submitted its name as one of the two partners in admission papers of 11 students of public administration department of 2004-2005 academic session.

The fact-finding committee was formed on October 10 last year in the wake of allegations of inconsistencies in admission papers of 11 students of public administration department of 2004-2005 academic session.

A drive was launched in March this year to identify fake students in the faculties of arts and social sciences following the probe committee's interim report on frauds in admission.

The syndicate yesterday also approved two students as legal after being confirmed about their admission.

On June 5, the authorities cancelled admission of 77 fake students, 44 of them were from public administration department. Of the rest, nine were from IR department, 22 from economics department and two from political science department and two from the social welfare and research institute.

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India, Pakistan home officials talk terror

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan's top home and interior ministry bureaucrats began two days of talks yesterday on terrorism and drug trafficking, officials from both sides said.

The talks in New Delhi, part of a slow three-year-old peace process between the two nuclear-armed rivals, were led by Indian home secretary Madhukar Gupta and Pakistan interior secretary Syed Kamal Shah.

"The Indian side will raise security concerns and urge the Pakistani side to widen cooperation in combating the menace of terrorism in deference to the objectives set out by the leaders of both countries," the Indian home ministry said in a statement on the eve of the talks.

India and Pakistan agreed to form a joint anti-terror panel after a series of blasts on crowded commuter trains in the financial hub of Mumbai a year ago that killed 186 people.

India has often blamed bloody attacks on its soil on militant groups based in Pakistan, which vigorously denies the accusations.

DU students

FROM PAGE 16

next syndicate meet.

The fact-finding committee working to detect fake students at the university yesterday reported to the syndicate about two students, who allegedly submitted fake freedom fighter certificates, to get enrolled under the quota.

One of them is from library science department and another from business studies faculty. These certificates have been sent to the Liberation War Ministry for clarification.

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Tuku's wife

FROM PAGE 1
of the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday ordered to send former state minister Tuku's wife Romana Mahmud, son Abed Hasan Mahmud and daughter Farah Hasan Mahmud to jail.

After Abed surrendered to the court and police produced Romana and Sarah before it, the court ordered to send them to jail rejecting their bail petitions.

The IO pressed charges against Tuku and three of his family members on June 28 and the court issued arrest warrants against Tuku's family members on July 2.

Following the warrants, Mohammadpur police yesterday noon arrested Romana and Farah from their residence and forwarded them to the court. After hearing of the arrest of his mother and sister, Abed, Tuku's son, surrendered to the court yesterday afternoon.

On July 2, DD of the ACC filed a case against Tuku and his three family members with Mohammadpur Police Station on March 21 as their wealth valued at Tk 35.95 crore did not match with the source of their income.

NASIM CASE

ACC Assistant Director Mahbul Alam submitted charge sheet against Nasim and his wife Laila with Dharmodi Police Station for providing false information in their wealth statements submitted to the ACC.

SHALUDDIN CASE

Another Dhaka Court yesterday framed charges against former BNP lawmaker Salauddin Ahmed in connection with a money laundering case filed with Shyampur Police Station.

SALAUDDIN CASE

On March 21, DD of the ACC filed a case against Nasim and his wife Laila with Dharmodi Police Station for providing false information in their wealth statements submitted to the ACC.

HUDACASE

Nasim is now in jail while his wife is on bail.

12 firearms

FROM PAGE 16

Revolver from there.

Rab sources said Bidhan and Sumon had been involved in arms trading and other criminal activities in the city for long. Kotwali police yesterday produced Bidhan in a magistrate's court that sent him to jail.

12 firearms

FROM PAGE 16

Sporadic exchanges of gunfire continued throughout the afternoon. The students torched two government buildings as the violence escalated, an AFP correspondent said.

Later students set fire to the nearby Ministry of Environment Building and a nearby property belonging to the Capital Development Authority. A loud blast was heard, believed to be related to the fires.

A cameraman for a private television channel was shot dead when troops let off a burst of gunfire to disperse the mob as it tried to smash up a nearby girls' school, an AFP photographer who witnessed the incident said.

In another operation, Rab-6 personnel arrested five drug peddlers in Daulatpur in Khulna City on Monday night.