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4-lane Dhaka-Ctg highway uncertain

Purchase body sends back proposal due to 'legal complications'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The advisory committee on purchase yesterday sent back the project proposal for a dedicated four-lane highway between Dhaka and Chittagong.

The fate of the much-talked-about project, which was mooted to ensure seamless transport of exports and imports, now hangs in the balance after the advisory committee decision.

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam, who headed the committee meeting, told reporters that the project could not be approved due a string of legal complica-

tions. The Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecne) had approved the highway project in past January at an estimated cost of Tk2,168 crore.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed put the project on the government's list of priorities in order to help increase the efficiency of the Chittagong Port by easing transport of imports and exports.

The communications ministry however cancelled the work order after a fact-finding committee reported irregularities in the process, sources said.

The contractors later filed a writ petition with the High Court which is still pending.

The purchase committee had earlier sent back the proposal more than once due to faulty awarding of the contract, a high official of the ministry said.

The committee yesterday approved importing 25,000 tonnes of MOP fertiliser from Belarus under a state-to-state purchase contract, at a cost of Tk180 crore.

A Tk 18 crore project to develop land at Uttara Ideal Residential Project was also approved at the meeting.



Maradona to coach Argentina

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine football legend Diego Maradona was named coach of the national side here on Tuesday according to 1986 World Cup winning coach Carlos Bilardo after he came out of a meeting with Argentinian Football Association

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Undecided voters wild card in presidential race

AFP, Washington

About six percent of US voters are still undecided in the final sprint of the White House race, boosting Republican John McCain hopes he may yet pull off a last-minute election day upset.

"Nobody knows what the margin will be like on November 4, and if it is large, the undecided will not matter," said Curtis Gans, director of the center for the study of the American electorate at American University in Washington.

"If it is narrow, it will matter." Those indecisive Americans are being fervently wooed by both parties in the final days of a two-year White House battle.

"We can't look back and think about what might have been," Michelle Obama, wife of front-runner Barack Obama, said Saturday in the Democratic Weekly

US POLLS 5 DAYS TO GO

Radio Address, warning listeners not to get complacent.

"So visit your neighbors. Listen to their concerns. Tell them what's at stake. Then take them with you to vote."

Republicans too are trying to whip up the vote.

"We're working day and night to win, and in the final days of the campaign we need the resources to reach every voter through mail, calls, advertisements and personal contact," McCain's running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, said Monday.

Just who are the undecided voters?

They come from all socio-economic backgrounds, and are not easily defined, according to Gans.

"There is not only one profile of

an undecided voter," Gans said.

Some have not had time to pay attention to the presidential race. Some are totally uninterested in politics, but will take the plunge and vote anyway next Tuesday.

Undecided voters are also found among those who follow politics very closely, but wait to the last minute to make up their minds.

The latest polls suggest that some undecided voters have been moving into the McCain camp as the clock ticks down.

Obama had a lead of 50.4 to 43.1 percent over McCain in RealClearPolitics' weekly average of polling data as of October 26 -- with 6.5 percent still uncommitted.

But the gap had tightened to 50.3 to 44.1 percent by October 27, with undecided numbers down to 5.5 percent.

Last minute deciders can influence the outcome most of all in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Nasheed new Maldives president

AFP, Male

A former political prisoner swept to victory in the Maldives' first democratic presidential election, vowing yesterday there would be no witch hunt after unseating Asia's longest-serving leader.

Supporters of Mohamed "Anni" Nasheed celebrated in the capital

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PHOTO: STAR

DRIVING TIGERS OUT OF DANGER: Bangladesh's Mashrafe Bin Mortaza lofts one over midwicket for four during his match-saving knock of 48 on the fifth and final day of the second and final Test against New Zealand at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Serial suicide blasts in Somalia kill 25

AFP, Mogadishu

At least 25 people in addition to the bombers were killed in five suicide car bomb attacks yesterday in two northern Somali breakaway states, officials said.

Three suicide car bombs struck the presidential palace, the United Nations Development Programme's compound and Ethiopia's diplomatic representation in Hargeysa, the capital of Somaliland.

"We have counted about 19 people, including the secretary of the palace, who were killed in the attacks," a Somaliland police official told AFP.

A local medical official spoke to at least 24 wounded admitted in hospitals after the blasts.

An Ethiopian foreign ministry spokesman told AFP in Addis Ababa that four Ethiopians were among the victims in the bombings of their representation.

"So far, we know that this

terrorist attack has claimed at least four lives, Ethiopian staff," Wahide Belay said, adding that at least another person was wounded.

"But this toll can go up as there were people in the premises who were waiting for visas or other services," he said.

Two other simultaneous suicide car bombs struck two separate buildings housing anti-terrorism centres run by the Puntland Intelligence Service (PIS) in the port city of Bosaso.

The president of Puntland, Mohamud Musa Hirsi Adde, said six members of the PIS were killed in the twin blasts.

"Six members of the Puntland Intelligence Service were killed by the attack in Bosaso," the president, who was in the economic capital of the semi-autonomous region, told reporters.

The overall death toll for the coordinated attacks stood at 30, including the five bombers.

Tame draw hands Kiwis the series

BISHWAJIT ROY

Shakib Al Hasan and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza put on a stubborn 78 runs for the seventh wicket as Bangladesh recovered from an early morning jitters to enforce a draw in the second and final Test of the BRAC Bank Series against New Zealand at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Resuming on 13-3 on the final day of the rain-ruled Test that saw the first three days completely washed out, the home side faced the prospect of batting for a second time after they were reduced to 44-6, still needing another 119 runs to avoid the follow-on.

But the left-right combination

of Shakib and Mashrafe combined together like it did in the second innings of the first Test to dash the Kiwi hopes of winning a match inside two days.

Shakib struck a well-composed 49 while Mashrafe, who was unlucky for the second time to miss a deserved half-century, fended off a rising ball from pacesman Ian O'Brien at silly mid-on after scoring a fluent 48.

When Mashrafe departed for 155-8, Bangladesh still needed another eight runs to cross the follow-on mark and number nine batsman Abdur Razzak did it in style, hitting two boundaries off successive deliveries from none other than the Kiwi captain Daniel Vettori, who however ran away

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

11 criminals held with arms, ammo

UNB, Jessore

Police arrested 11 criminals and seized arms and ammunition and drugs from their possession in separate drives in Jessore town and Benapole on Tuesday night.

The seized items are 12 fire-arms, seven bullets, 25 cocktails and 1,000 bottles of phensidyl, official sources said.

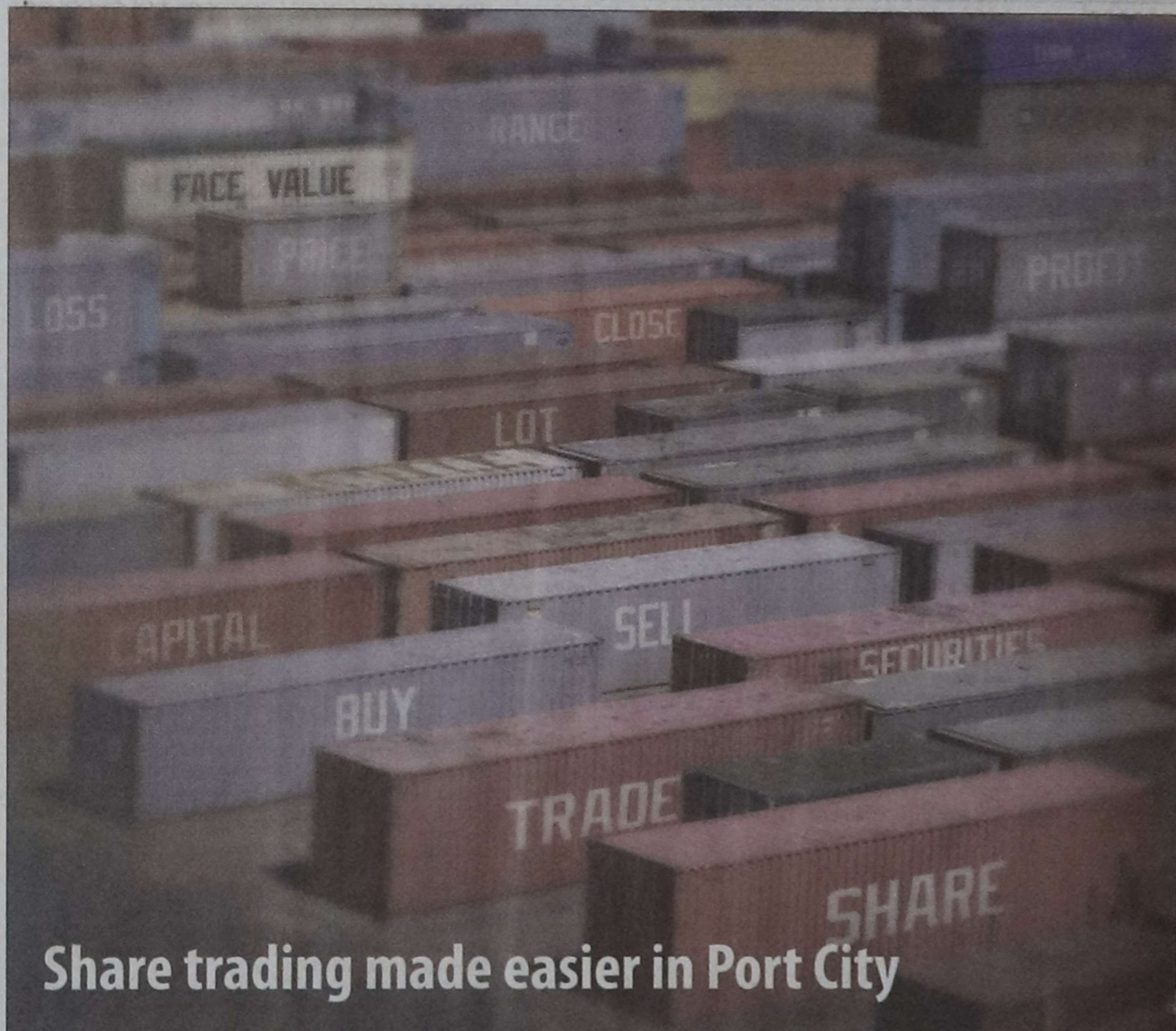
The law enforcers raided Mainpara area in the town at midnight and arrested local criminal

Khaleq. They seized a shutter gun, two pipeguns and four cartridges from him.

In another drive, police arrested criminals Nurunnabi and Zinnat and recovered a 9MM pistol, a shutter gun, three bullets and 10 cocktails from their possession.

They also found a shutter gun, two pipeguns and 15 cocktails in abandoned condition in Chanchra and Lalidighi areas of the town.

Some 1,000 bottles of phensidyl were seized and a drug peddler, SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



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