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Bridge faulty or the river?

Cargo vessels can't pass through under-construction Third Buriganga Bridge; project boss rejects claim of wrongdoings

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Third Buriganga Bridge at Basila has been built at least two meters below its vertical clearance requirement, seriously undermining the river's navigability and flouting contractual prerequisite.

By building the bridge at the lower height, the officials involved in the construction of the bridge, which was approved in October 2003 and will be completed in 2010, have siphoned off several crores of taka, said sources.

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development donated Tk 49 crore required for the construction of the 2,300 feet long and 33 feet wide Third Buriganga Bridge.

Concerns over the height of the bridge first came to light during this year's rainy season when Basila residents witnessed many vessels suffering difficulties in passing under the bridge.

Vessels, which had unloaded their merchandise at Mirpur and Amin Bazar, could navigate under the bridge only when they filled their hulls with water sinking the boats lower than usual.

Threatened with the risk of their business turning non-lucrative, owners of larger vessels lodged complaints expressing their concern over the vertical clearance of the bridge.

SEE PAGE 12 COL 6



The cargo vessel got stuck while passing under the Third Buriganga Bridge as the bridge is being built two metres below the contract prerequisite.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM

Speaker rejects all 35 notices of opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker Abdul Hamid yesterday rejected all 35 notices from opposition lawmakers demanding discussions in parliament on various issues including the much-talked Tipaimukh dam, shortage of power and gas, law and order slide, extortion and tender manipulation.

BNP lawmakers and an independent MP had submitted the notices to the parliament secretariat and demanded for holding discussions in the House adjourning the scheduled business. Independent lawmaker Fazlul Azim in his notice also raised the same demand.

A ruling Awami League lawmaker, Omar Faruk Chowdhury, also submitted a notice demanding discussion on operation of irrigation by using submersible water pumps. But it was also rejected by the speaker.

Earlier in the last two sessions of parliament, Speaker Abdul Hamid also turned down all notices served by

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Infant dies of swine flu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A four-month-old baby girl died of swine flu outside the capital on Thursday. Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) confirmed at a press briefing yesterday.

The baby who underwent treatment for swine flu and congenital defect for about a month at a hospital out of the capital breathed her last on Thursday.

The name of the child and her whereabouts were not revealed as the family of the victim had to face a lot of troubles while performing religious rituals especially during namaz-e-janaza, said sources from IEDCR.

The government earlier confirmed the first death from the H1N1 virus on August 30 when 37-year-old Mitali Chakrabarty died at Labaid Hospital in the capital.

But the cause of death of another person Sobhan alias Sagar, 20, who died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital was not confirmed as swine flu in the laboratory. It was clinically confirmed.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Graft court hiring called into question

Law secy today explains appointments, 2 judges' retirement story to JS body

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Proper procedures were not followed in appointing judges and public prosecutors to the special courts formed by the last caretaker government to try the graft cases, a deputy law secretary has alleged.

The House committee on the law ministry recorded the official's allegation at its August 27 meeting with the law minister and state minister in attendance, say proceedings of the meeting.

Law Secretary Kazi Habibul Awal has been asked to attend the committee meeting today to explain the appointments of judges and lawyers and also the now-scrapped controver-

sial decision to send two district judges into forced retirement.

Ten district judges and over a dozen prosecutors were appointed to the special courts on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises for trial of corruption cases against political and business bigwigs and bureaucrats.

Since detailed information is missing from the appointment files, the law ministry official could not apprise the committee elaborately of the matter.

"It's been learnt that the judges and lawyers were appointed by the DGFI and the taskforce formed to combat corruption," read the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

PM okays Chevron gas compressor on GTCL system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prime minister yesterday approved a Petrobangla proposal to award a \$52.7 million contract to US company Chevron to install a gas compressor station to improve gas flow pressure in the Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL) system under a Production Sharing Contract (PSC).

The approval was given amid a number of contradictions, including that the GTCL is not a party to the PSC and that earlier the Petrobangla chairman had a GTCL tender for the compressor cancelled to award the deal to Chevron. He has been pursuing Chevron to install the compressor station at Muchai on GTCL's pipeline.

This project would also be a unique example where a PSC operator like Chevron would hold a stake in a national gas transmission system without any clear legal framework to support it, experts noted. This is also an unsolicited deal.

Energy Secretary Mohammad Mohsin told the press that since the tender was cancelled, a retender would take at least another two years time. But as Chevron's compressor can be installed within 18 to 20 months, it would be helpful to improve gas pressure quickly.

The secretary however added that by next year, the GTCL will be able to float a tender for two other compressors under financing from Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Chevron will be given the work order within one month, he added. The \$52.7 million investment for this compressor will be recovered from the Chevron-operated gas fields in Block-12.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) had earlier sought Petrobangla Chairman M Muktadir Ali's explanation on a host of issues relating to the gas compressor scheme, including why the GTCL's tender for compressors was cancelled and whether he

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Fitra fixed at Tk 40

UNB, Dhaka

Fitra for Dhaka and its adjoining areas has been fixed at Tk 40 per head this year.

Islamic Foundation at its meeting yesterday fixed the amount.

The meeting was presided over by Maulana Mohammad Salahuddin, Khaib of Baiful Mukarram National Mosque.

A press release of Islamic Foundation said the Fitra of Tk 40 has been fixed for Dhaka and adjacent areas, taking into consideration the price of rice and flour.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

DEFAMATION CASE Moeen files petition for dismissal

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Former army chief Moeen U Ahmed filed a petition with a Dhaka court yesterday asking for dismissal of the defamation case against him.

Former state minister for energy Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku filed the Tk 100-crore defamation suit on July 12 accusing the former

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8



Tupi rewrites their fate

Its export to Oman creates jobs for 3,500 rural women

RAFIQUE SARKER, Rangpur

Jahora Bewa, in a utter of Ganga Narayan village, was an widow when her two sons left her. Finding no other way, she began begging from door to door. At one stage of seeking alms, she luckily got a work of knitting tupis (cap) under a female supervisor. Now she herself supervises such knitting work and earns about Tk 2,000 a month.

Not only 65-year-old Jahora, about 3,500 poor women from ten villages of Kaunia upazila of the district, including school and college going female students, are now earning money by knitting tupis at their own house for a factory of Abdul Awal who started his venture in 2004 at Sahbaz village of the upazila.

Kaunia upazila was affected by 'monga'

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Women of Araji Khordo Bhutpara under Kounia upazila earn their livelihood by making Tupi (cap) in an open place outside home. Inset finished tupis are piled up and ready for sale.

INDO-BANGLA TALKS Power import, river dredging discussed

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Import of power from India to Bangladesh, allowing greater access to goods from Bangladesh into Indian market and New Delhi's 'positive interest' in dredging ports and rivers in the country figured prominently as the two countries held wide-ranging talks here yesterday.

Water sharing from common rivers of the two countries, economic, security and border issues and increased connectivity in the region including India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh were also discussed during the two and a half hours talks at the Hyderabad House.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni led the Bangladesh delegation

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1

Promotion lulls admin Ministries pass almost a 'no workday' as new assignments not distributed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Monday's massive promotion of 494 civil servants has left Bangladesh Secretariat in sluggishness as officers promoted and attached to the establishment ministry as officers on special duty (OSD) hardly worked yesterday.

This hampered the daily activities at the secretariat. A secretary described the situation as a direct impact of the wholesale promotion.

The same situation was observed at other ministries at the secretariat. Many officials said the sluggishness in the administration would remain until and unless the government distributes offices among the officers promoted as deputy secretaries, joint secretaries and additional secretaries. And this

would be a difficult task, they said.

The establishment ministry issued three gazette notifications on Monday, promoting 271 senior assistant secretaries to the rank of deputy secretaries, 163 deputy secretaries to joint secretaries, and 60 joint secretaries to additional secretaries.

The government took the move to give promotions at all levels of the administration, giving priority to those who were "deprived and denied promotion" by the previous governments, and keeping in mind a reshuffle plan to run the administration properly.

Sources said the government has to upgrade posts at various levels to accommodate the promoted officers.

The government yesterday directed 22

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

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