

# Sea ride made too risky for tourists

Two ships carry several times more than capacity from Teknaf to St Martin's Island

A CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two ships—Keari Sindbad and LTC Kutubdia—are ferrying tourists from Teknaf in Cox's Bazar to St Martin's Island on sea route at huge risk as they are carrying passengers several times more than their capacity.

Passengers also alleged that the two ships charge excess fare creating adverse reaction among the tourists.

Some journalists on a spot visit at 9:00am on Saturday found that Keari Sindbad took 1,170 passengers for a fare of Tk 700 to 1,000 per head and LTC Kutubdia took about 2,200 tourists on board. After boarding the ships the tourists were surprised as they did not find room to stand comfortably, let alone find a seat.

After returning from the spot by the news-men, Teknaf upazila administration on the day fined LTC Kutubdia and Keari Sindbad Tk 20,000 and Tk 10,000 respectively for carrying passengers beyond their capacity.

Sources concerned said LTC Kutubdia started ferrying passengers from September 22 and Keari Sindbad from September 24.

The ships leave Teknaf between 9:00am and 9:30am after crossing about 25km on the Naf river and the Bay of Bengal and reach St Martin's Island between 12noon and 1:00pm. The ships on their return journey carrying tourists reach Teknaf around 3:30pm.

Meanwhile, three tourists fell into the river while boarding Keari Sindbad using a wooden ladder on Friday morning. Later, they were rescued, sources said.

A tourist Alamgir Chowdhury, 45, who came from Moghbazar in Dhaka said last year he went to St Martin's Island by Keari Sindbad by paying a fare of Tk 300 per head fare. This time he had to pay Tk 750 for a ticket of the same ship.

The ship owners have increased ticket price several times on the excuse of excessive rush of tourists and on the other hand they are carrying

four to five times more passengers than their capacity. The administration's monitoring in the regard is not visible, he alleged.

Alamgir said on Friday when Keari Sindbad took about 1,000 tourists some of them objected to it but its manager Shah Alam did not pay heed to them rather took some more tourists on board. "Later I and some other tourists got off the ship and returned to Cox's Bazar," he said.

Refuting the allegation Shah Alam said their ship left for St Martin's Island carrying 400 passengers on Friday morning and realised Tk 600 to 700 as fare per head.

Shahabuddin, manager of St Martin Jetty, said on Friday he realised the fixed revenue allowing 2,959 passengers to get on the island. Of them, LTC Kutubdia carried 1,980 passengers while Keari Sindbad 989 tourists.

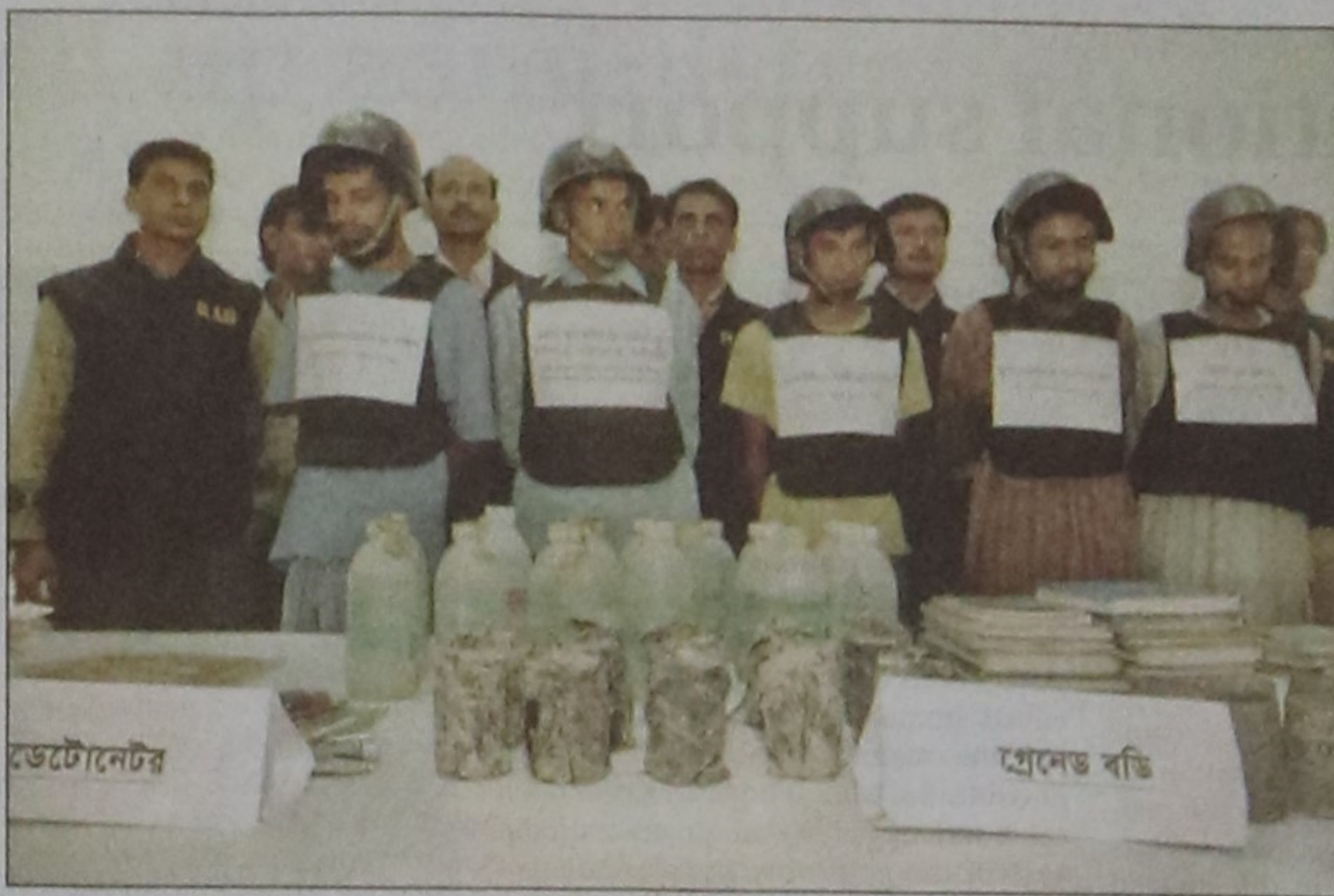
Tofael Ahmed, former vice president of Tour Operators Association, Cox's Bazar (TOAC) said last year five ships plied this route but now only the two ships are plying. As a result, they are carrying more passengers than their capacity.

Another official of TOAC said passenger carrying capacity of Keari Sindbad is 280 while LTC Kutubdia, 490.

Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer AMM Nazimuddin said they have shortage of manpower to monitor carrying excess passengers and realising high fare as most of the staff have gone on leave for Eid. He said a committee would be formed in a day or two in this regard.

Police Super Mohammad Sakawat Hossain said the journey of tourists on Teknaf-St Martin route should be safe. So, police would see to it, he said.

Thousands of tourists have thronged Cox's Bazar from the day after the Eid-ul-Fitr. Several thousand tourists not finding accommodation in the town are going to Teknaf and St Martin's Island, sources said.



Five JMB militants being paraded in a press briefing at Rab Headquarters in Uttara in the capital yesterday. They were arrested from across the country during the last two days.

## SQ Chy safe

He gets away with derogatory remarks

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has directed her party colleagues to ask Salaudhin Quader Chowdhury not to make derogatory remarks that might be harmful to the party, said BNP insiders.

Party Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain however yesterday said Salaudhin has already given explanation for his remarks before the media.

"It will not be right to do anything further on this issue," he told journalists at the party office.

Salaudhin said some "scavengers", who don't have any political identity, reacted angrily to his remarks.

The BNP leader said he did not take the matter into account as the party chairperson also ignored them.

In interviews with the media recently, Salaudhin alleged that some party leaders are trying to take advantage of Tarique Rahman and party chairperson's Gulshan office to serve their own interests. He also said Khaleda is blinded by affection for her sons.

Salaudhin, who has again come to the limelight through his "controversial remarks" about party chairperson's son Tarique and her Gulshan office, now has support from a strong quarter of the party.

A section of party leaders are trying to convince the chairperson to take action against Salaudhin, but the party chief has only directed a top BNP leader to ask Salaudhin not to make any derogatory statement.

Selima Rahman, BNP joint secretary general and a close aide to the chairperson, said the party chief is fully aware of the issue but one's personal opinion should not be given prominence.

"It is not a big issue," she added.

Echoing her opinion, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, another joint secretary gen-

eral of the party, said Salaudhin might have wanted to give a surprise and those who brought out a procession against Salaudhin want to strengthen their position using the issue.

Another party leader, who met the chairperson several times in last few days, said the issue would be settled strategically as Salaudhin is not only a party leader but also a BNP lawmaker.

"The chairperson has expressed annoyance and already given directives in this regard," he told The Daily Star.

Party insiders said a group of party activists opposing Salaudhin brought out the procession in front of the BNP Chairperson's Gulshan office on Saturday night demanding his expulsion from the party.

"As usual, those who do business using politics are angry because my statement might prove harmful to them," Salaudhin said yesterday while talking to The Daily Star. Asked whether he is embarrassed at the demonstration against him, Salaudhin said none can make him feel embarrassed.

"I have no reason to feel embarrassed since I don't hold any post in the party. I just say everything without any hesitation as I'm a grass-roots-level worker."

Party leaders said the chairperson has expressed her disappointment but she does not want to give the issue any importance. However, some senior and mid-level party leaders want to capitalise on it to strengthen their position in the party.

Some party leaders have taken stance in favour of Salaudhin, saying there was nothing in his statement that violates party discipline.

"Salaudhin Quader Chowdhury made remarks against Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka which earned him support from anti-Khoka leaders," said a BNP leader wishing anonymity.

## Asian rivals sit for talk amid Mumbai shadow

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New York

Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers are set to hold crucial talks Sunday with India expected to focus on terrorism and Pakistan resisting a linkage with action against 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

Ahead of Sunday's talks between External Affairs Minister SM Krishna and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi, their top diplomats had what was described as a 'useful exchange of views' Saturday.

"We had a useful exchange of views," Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao told reporters after a two-hour long meeting with her Pakistani counterpart Salman Bashir.

The Indian side insisted on concerted action and the need to complete the process of investigation of the Mumbai attacks because the conspiracy emanated in Pakistan, an Indian official said. "There is a need to bring the investigation to a satisfactory conclusion," he added.

Bashir too described Saturday's talks as 'useful' that helped in understanding the perspectives of the two parties 'more clearly', but suggested that New Delhi should not hold the relationship back on a single issue as it has done what was 'required' in the case.

"The question is how do we move beyond this point. The relationship cannot be held or brought to a standstill because of a trial or one investigation," he said.

"What our Indian friends need to realise is that much more than India, Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism so playing the victim does not help really," Bashir said.

"As far as Pakistan is concerned, I think, I have personally found the meeting useful because we were able to touch upon a lot of issues, including issues which are of primary concern to India, that is the Mumbai investigations," he said.

"Pakistan has nothing to hide, in fact, we have been very forthcoming on the quality of the work that has been done by our experts in terms of investigations and the arrests etceteras, and all that has been shared with India," he said.

"It is now, I believe, time that India recognises, which they have, that Pakistan has done what was required," Bashir added.

The Pakistani diplomat said: "We seek a meaningful engagement to address all issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. We look with a great deal of optimism and confidence for the future of our region."

## VAT on health

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order since it contradicts VAT Act 1991. We will try to implement the act but the decisions depend on the court."

On July 14, the HC declared imposition of VAT on citizens for providing health services illegal.

The HC had also declared illegal and unconstitutional the provisions of VAT Act 1991 for realising VAT from patients for making any prescription or conducting pathological tests.

Lawyers said the HC verdict established people's fundamental right to life guaranteed by the constitution.

Supreme Court lawyer advocate Manzill Murshid along with two other lawyers had filed the public interest litigation petition with the HC against charging citizens VAT for taking healthcare services.

Health centres found still realising VAT in a confidential investigation by the petitioners include Ibne Sina, Popular Diagnostic, Modern Diagnostic, Square Hospital, United Hospital, Medinova, Shomorita Hospital, Monowara Hospital, Labaid Hospital, Central Hospital, Delta Hospital, Apollo Hospital, Brighton Hospital, Comfort Diagnostic, Compah Ltd and City Hospital.

Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star, "We have sent legal notices to hospitals charging patients VAT, which constitutes contempt of court."

He said they requested the authorities of these hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres to stop realising VAT from patients within three days of receiving the notice circulated on Sunday, otherwise the lawyers might file contempt of court cases against them.

Owners of a few hospitals, however, claimed that they did not commit contempt of court because they did not receive any government order for not collecting VAT.

"We have written to the National Board of Revenue about the court's directive and sought its guidance regarding what to do. But we have not got any answer yet," said Dr Moniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners' Association.

"Unless we receive any government order, we have to follow the NBR's rules...Without instructions from the NBR, we cannot stop charging patients VAT," he said.

Director (medical services) of Square Hospital Ltd, Prof Sanowar Hossain yesterday declined to make any comment, asking this correspondent to contact the hospitals' business department for information on the matter.

Executive Director of Brighton Hospital Sohel Rana said, "NBR officials still visit health institutions to check whether VAT is being collected or not...They visited our hospital and asked us to collect VAT, saying otherwise the hospital will be shut down."

On February 15, the HC had issued a rule upon the government asking it to explain why the rules of VAT Act 1991 to realise VAT from citizens against health services should not be declared illegal.

## AL lawmaker sued for graft

Irregularities in teacher recruitment alleged against Ishak Talukder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Awami League lawmaker Ishak Hossain Talukder and 21 others were sued with the district court yesterday on charge of corruption and irregularities in teacher recruitment process of Fulzhor Degree College in Raiganj upazila.

Dr Jinnat Rehana, lecturer of Biology department of the college, filed the case against Ishak, also chairman of the college managing committee, and other members. It is the first case against any Awami League lawmaker in the district.

Jinnat in the case alleged that Ishak Hossain selected Nasrin Khatun for the post of vice-principal of the college through a 'fake examination' held on September 6.

It said Nasrin joined the college as a lecturer of Physics on August 16, 1999 from Satabria College in Shahzadpur upazila without resigning from her previous post. She also withdrew salary from both the colleges for a long time.

As Rejaul Karim retired from the principal post on October 26, 2008, Nasrin was given the charge of acting principal of Fulzhor Degree College on seniority basis.

It mentioned that as per the rules of the National University, if the post of the principal of a college falls vacant, the position should be filled in within six months of the vacancy and the newly appointed principal will appoint teachers, vice-principal or other staff maintaining proper recruitment process.

Nasrin has been selected for the post of vice-principal after a negotiation with chairman of the managing committee Ishak Hossain on payment of a big amount of bribe money.

Outgoing principal Rejaul Karim published an advertisement in the Daily Korotoa on August 15, 2008 seeking application for the post. But no fresh advertisement for this recruitment was published in any newspaper later.

The managing committee issued interview card to Nasrin but did not issue in favour of another applicant Jinnat Rehana.

Refuting the allegation, Nasrin said the recruitment process was legal. When contacted over cell phone, Ishak Hossain's personal secretary Solaiman said he could not hand over the phone, as the lawmaker was sick.

## 2006 ASSAULT ON WOMAN

## Court accepts case against 28 cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday took into cognisance a case filed by Shahin Sultana Shanta on March 12, 2006 after 28 policemen, including two then Deputy Commissioners (DC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, assaulted her.

Judge Mohammad Ismail of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order upon a criminal revision filed against the dismissal order of the lower court.

Shahin, wife of Supreme Court lawyer Atiur Rahman, filed the revision petition on October 30, 2006.

On May 21, 2006, Fourth Special Tribunal for Women and Children Repression dismissed the case, saying allegations brought against the policemen were not proved by the Criminal Investigation Department's investigation.

The accused were then DC (South) Mazharul Huq, DC (West) Kohinur Miah, constable Ruhul Amin and 25 other unnamed policemen.

In the complaint, Shanta said the police assaulted and dragged her out of a clinic where she took shelter during fracas between the police and then opposition party activists in front of Rapa Plaza in the capital's Dhanmondi area while she was going to pick her son from a school in that area.

She also complained that the accused snatched gold ornaments worth about Tk 75,000, a mobile phone set, a wristwatch and Tk 14,000 in cash from her possession.

Shanta, in the statement, referred to the "medieval barbarism" of the police which got publicity in different national dailies and the electronic media.

## Controlling Ctg

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position in the port city. They claimed that they now know that their glory days are fading and they have joined hands to keep their turf in Chittagong city.

The September 24 meeting is being considered politically significant for both SQ Chowdhury and the mayor, particularly when mayoral polls to Chittagong City Corporation is around the corner. Sources said the mayor wants to be the AL-backed candidate in the polls to be held next year.

Centring the election, Mohiuddin, who faced strong opposition within his party in recent times, wants effective support from rival BNP in the next CCC poll. Sources said the three times mayor always had "negotiations" with the local BNP bigwigs ahead of the CCC elections.

In the last CCC elections, he had a deal with BNP leader Abdullah AL Noman to defeat BNP candidate Mir Nasir Uddin, sources in the AL claimed. Since this time around Noman himself is a possible BNP candidate, Mohiuddin chooses SQ Chowdhury to have a deal with and keep dominating politics in Chittagong city.

Sources said ahead of the 2005 CCC election, Mohiuddin had said that Noman was a relative of him and this time he has already claimed that SQ Chowdhury is his nephew.

Party insiders said the mayor has adopted old strategies this time too to ensure victory in the election if he is nominated.

Talking to The Daily Star, a presidium member of AL said the party would try to resolve the issue after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returns home from the USA.

Mohiuddin, who invited SQ Chowdhury to his home a day after Eid, is now facing the wrath of local AL leaders and lawmakers and the BNP leader too is facing his party wrath for making remarks against Tarique Rahman and Khaleda Zia's political office in Gulshan.

Divided into different factions, leaders and activists of both parties have been demanding expulsion of the two leaders from their parties.

AL leaders and lawmakers in the port city have been demanding stern action against the mayor for holding the meeting with "war criminal" SQ Chowdhury who made objectionable remarks about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's killing on 15 August, 1975.

Protesting the mayor's meeting with the controversial BNP leader, a section of AL men attacked a public meeting of Mohiuddin Friday.

For the last two days, angry AL and BNP workers set fire to their effigies in the port city.

Talking to The Daily Star, member of Chittagong City AL AIM Nasir Uddin said they could not accept the unethical activities of the mayor.

Nasir said he would be a candidate in the CCC elections since Mohiuddin is unlikely to get party nomination due to a popularity decline triggered by his "arrogant" activities.

"In fact Mohiuddin Chowdhury held the meeting with SQ Chowdhury only to mount psychological pressure on party chief Sheikh Hasina so that she ensures his candidacy," said Nasir.

He said upon arrival of the party president from the USA, they would demand expulsion of Mohiuddin from the party.

## World power giants eye

FROM PAGE 1

These are Bibiyana phase-2 450 mw power, Meghnaghat-2 450 mw and Bhola-2 150 mw projects.

A top PDB source says PDB initiated these IPP as the phase-1 of each of these projects are being delayed for one reason or another.

The Bibiyana 450 mw IPP under the Power Cell is proceeding very slowly, the Meghnaghat-2 project was previously cancelled and the first Bhola project being funded by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for the PDB is also going very slow.

Besides, there is just adequate gas in the Shahbazpur gas field in Bhola, being developed by Bapex, to support two 150 mw power projects. The PDB would have to develop power grid to evacuate the power from the island to the mainland.

"But if PDB goes for IPP now, we are confident that these projects can be implemented at a fast pace," says the top PDB official.

While many have earlier criticised the government's plans for taking up such massive power projects as 'unrealistic', serious investors say these are possible and these are required for the country.

And part of it was reflected at a pre-bid meeting on 530 mw eight rental power projects at the PDB headquarters yesterday where more than 100 representatives of dozen power companies took part.

Many of these companies have sprung up overnight, while many are well established.

The deadline for submission of bid documents for these eight rental power plants is October 22 and already 24 companies have purchased bid documents.

Some bidders told The Daily Star that PDB and the power ministry appeared to be quite serious with these projects and so far their actions have been rebuilding bidders' confidence.

On the other hand, fortune-seeking overnight power companies built by some politically influential people seem unhappy about certain terms and conditions dictated by the PDB-power ministry, they say.

"The pre-bid meeting for the rental power projects yesterday opened with a note from Power Secretary AK Azad that the government is serious about these rental power projects," said PDB Chairman Alamgir Kabir.

He told the interested bidders, "You are soldiers of these projects, do not expect time extension for project

implementation like in the past."

During the caretaker government rule, more than eight rental power projects were awarded mostly to local companies. Most of them could not launch operation even after a year behind schedule and the defaulting companies even did not pay due penalty. Their contracts also could not be cancelled due to a host of reasons.

"But this time, we have set the criterion that if the bidder awarded with a diesel-based power project fails to meet the project implementation deadline, it will be allowed a delay of 30 days by paying \$500 per-megawatt penalty. On the 31st day, its contract will be automatically be terminated," said the PDB chairman.

"In case of a furnace oil-based power project, the contractor will get 90 days penalty period and on the 91st day, its contract will be terminated."

The diesel-based rental projects will have a three-year contract and the furnace oil-based ones a five-year contract. The diesel projects are Bheramara 100 mw, Katakali 50 mw, Thakurgaon 50 mw and Syedpur 50 mw.

The furnace oil projects are Noapara 100 mw, Madanganj 100 mw, Jamalpur 30 mw and Barisal 50 mw. The diesel plants will be given 120 days for implementation and the furnace oil plants 270 days.

At yesterday's meeting participated by a large number of local and international bidders, various issues were discussed regarding contract duration, some vital bidding criteria, fuel handling and other issues.

Surprisingly, the meeting was not attended by anyone from the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), which plays the key role in ensuring uninterrupted supply of fuel oil.

The meeting was participated among others by local Energy Prima and GBB, both of which are defaultier rental power project contractors of the caretaker regime.

They argued that PDB must allow 180 days implementation time for diesel plants instead of 120 days.

The PDB chairman responded that the government was willing to pay premium price for these plants so that the irrigation in the next season does not get interrupted. Therefore, there was no scope for flexibility.

The bidders expressed confusion over the PDB's not taking responsibility for the fuel for the rental power projects. Unlike that in the past,

PDB is asking bidders to develop their own fuel storage system and ensure minimum 15 days of fuel storage.

The bidders said without cooperation of BPC and PDB, a rental power company could not ensure fuel supply or have fuel storage capacity. "This can never be a responsibility of a power company," says Summit Power chief Aziz Khan.

Sources say PDB was trying to pass this onus on rental companies as it failed to break a nexus of a section of unscrupulous employees of PDB and BPC which would steal thousands of tonnes of fuel oil from PDB's storage system, making PDB pay for the stolen oil.

The bidders raised this point saying this would create chaos and discourage bidders, resulting in the PDB chief's comment that it would be decided later.

The chairman also said a bidder may submit bids in all the eight projects, but it would not be awarded more than two power projects. The bidder will not be allowed to show the same equipment for different bids it is vying for.

The bidder must own a generator or have a certificate from the manufacturer stating that it has the equipment ready for the specific power project. The PDB will not accept vague certificates like in the past.

Some interested bidders asked the PDB chairman if the land for the project sites could be "leased" to them for "token money" so that they could use the land for collateral to obtain loan.

The PDB chairman ruled it out saying the land belongs to PDB and it will be used for temporary purpose and there was no scope for using PDB's land for a private company's collateral.

"We have had very good response due to the online launching of tenders," Chairman Alamgir Kabir told The Daily Star.

Talking to The Daily Star, Summit Power chief Aziz Khan went on record about the government's massive plan in the sector. "This plan is right given the demand scenario and the availability of country's gas, coal, foreign exchange reserve and Tk 30,000 crore non-invested money resting with the banks. The country can aim even bigger."

He said money was not in short supply for the sector. "But Bangladesh's most successful story is with its Private Sector Policy. Why is the government sitting with IPPs? The IPPs can bring finances very easily," he noted.