

10 firms bid

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Middle East to ease the country's gas crisis in next two years.

Petrobangla's tender to set up such infrastructure drew participation of Gas De France, Golar LNG Energy Management of Singapore, Teekay Shipping Canada, Vitol Singapore, Samsung South Korea, joint venture of Astra Oil (the Netherlands) and Excelerate (the US), Hiranandi Pvt Co of India with Hoegh LNG, Norway, BW Gas Norway, Ros Roca Group of Spain and local Unination Energy Ltd.

Of these interested bidders, Norwegian BW Gas did not provide bank draft with its pre-qualification documents, though it was necessary.

Petrobangla would now review the documents and select the companies that are found technically and financially capable of submitting their proposals to install the terminal in Maheshkhali. The government would then choose its contractor from the lowest competent bidders.

The selected contractor will set up the terminal on build, own, operate and transfer (BOOT) basis with 15 years' validity.

Petrobangla floated the tender two months ago seeking bidders who have experience of building such offshore LNG terminals.

The government planned to import LNG as a backup solution for the existing gas-based consumers. While the country is reeling under severe gas crisis for the last several years, Petrobangla or the government did very little to increase local gas production to overcome this shortfall. Now the difference has become so wide that an increase of local production

China president

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other's major interests," Hu said.

"Otherwise our relations will suffer constant trouble or even tension," he warned. Obama, at a joint news conference with Hu on Wednesday, had urged China to engage in talks with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, although he reaffirmed the US view that the Himalayan territory is part of China.

The United States and its allies, particularly Japan, have repeatedly voiced concern about China's double-digit growth of military spending. China tested a stealth fighter this month just as US Defence Secretary Robert Gates visited.

Hu dismissed concerns, saying: "We do not engage in arms races or pose a military threat to any country."

"We do not engage in arms races, or pose a military threat to any country. China will never seek hegemony or pursue an expansionist policy," Hu said.

Zia executed

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He took over immediately after the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib on August 15, 1975," Moudud quoted from the book.

The two sides [the officers and Zia] needed each other in order to survive both as a class and a force in the civil-military structure of the country, the book said.

When it came to sentencing Taher, all of the forty-six repatriated officers summoned by Zia to discuss the issue wanted he be hanged, the book says.

Moudud, however, did not go for details about the officials.

Moudud Ahmed, a former law minister, quoted from the book, "The question remains: why did Zia allow the execution of Taher, the person who freed him from captivity and installed him in power? During the war they fought in the same sector and were known to be very close friends for long."

Moudud finds an answer too: "In a difficult post-independence situation, Zia had to strike a balance with the repatriated officers to strengthen his own position in the army."

A conflict ensued as under the leadership of Col Taher, Gono Bahini [People's Army, an underground offshoot of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal in the early 70's] had killed many army officers, he said.

might always lag behind the demand.

As part of constructing an LNG terminal, which might cost a few hundred million dollars, the government is acquiring land in Maheshkhali. The government would also have to construct a 30-inch diameter and 90km-long pipeline so that the LNG can be transmitted to the national grid in Chittagong.

The contractor will realise its investment by tariff based on terminal capacity and gas delivery.

The government has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Qatar to import the LNG up to the rate of 500 million cubic feet per day (mmcf).

The cost of LNG would be much higher than that of the country's own gas. Sources say it would hover between \$7 and \$8 per thousand cubic metre (mcf) as opposed to \$1.2 of the local gas price.

However, the LNG would provide energy security and its cost would be reduced by mixing the local gas with it.

Currently, there is a daily supply shortfall of 400 to 500 mmcf of gas. The level of shortfall is increasing every year by 7 to 10 percent due to lack of increase in supply.

At present, US oil company Chevron has a proposal to increase its gas production by more than 900 mmcf within 2013, while there are also smaller-level plans to increase gas production.

Ershad

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Chairman HM Ershad yesterday.

JP leaders in different municipalities had stopped preparing for the election after the 19 candidates of JP were declared as nominees of the grand alliance following discussions with Awami League leaders, he said in a statement.

"But, it is a matter of regret that AL-backed candidates contested the mayoral posts of 19 municipalities, leading to poor results of Jatiya party," Ershad said, adding that the rebel candidates, in most of the cases, were also responsible for the defeat of the grand alliance-backed candidates.

The recent election has proved once again that party decision can not be executed in the local government election, he said while giving his observation over the polls.

The high price of essentials was another reason the grand alliance-backed candidates could not succeed in the polls, he observed.

The results, at least in half of the municipalities, did not come in favour of the grand alliance, as it failed to ensure single candidate in almost all the municipalities, he added.

RMG workers clash with cops, 22 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At least 22 people, including seven policemen, were hurt as workers of Uttara Export Processing Zone yesterday clashed with police and barricaded Dhaka-Nilphamari highway for hours demanding withdrawal of two cases filed against 11 workers.

Officer-in-charge of Nilphamari Police Station Nurul Islam and a security officer of the EPZ, Khalilur Rahman were among the injured.

Earlier, Diaz Spinning and Knitting Ltd and Evergreen Products Factory Ltd had filed two cases under Speedy Trial Act on January 2, 2011 and December 19, 2010 against 11 workers for vandalising the factories, obstructing others to attend work and other charges. Police arrested all the accused, of whom two obtained bail later.

The workers yesterday took to the streets around 9:00am and blocked the Nilphamari-Syedpur-Dhaka highway demanding withdrawal of both the cases filed against 11 workers of Uttara Sweater Manufacturing Company Ltd, the biggest unit at the EPZ.

They also demanded release of nine arrested workers and expulsion of Golam Mostafa, a personal assistant of a high official of Uttara Sweater Manufacturing Company Ltd, for harassing female workers.

Villagers also joined the workers and started pelting brick chips at the law enforcers.

Police from Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur rushed to the spot and charged batons, fired teargas shells and rubber bullets on the workers to disperse them. The clash ceased at 1:30pm after members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) joined the police and six workers were arrested on the spot.

Following the violence, Hong Kong based Uttara Sweater Manufacturing Company Ltd and Diaz Spinning and Knitting Ltd shut down their factories for an indefinite period, said Hafizur Rahman, general manager of Uttara EPZ.

On January 5, the workers staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the deputy commissioner's (DC) office. They also handed over a memorandum to the DC on December 18, 2010 demanding realisation of their eight-point charter of demands.

Twin tragedy

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Six of the dead have been identified as Swadhin, 20, Kuddus, 55, Russell, 22, and Rashidul Islam, 27, of Polashbari upazila of Gaibandha, and Raja Miah, 50, and Bulbul, 30, of Rangpur town.

The remaining three could not be identified till filing of this report at 8:30pm.

The injured were admitted to different hospitals in Rangpur and Gaibandha. Twelve of them were stated to be in critical condition.

A mob set fire to the Uttar Banga Paribahan bus, while police seized the other two buses.

All three drivers and their assistants, however, managed to flee the scene.

After the accidents, hundreds of vehicles were stranded on either side of the highway. Traffic returned to normal by 10:00am.

Left in the lurch

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Asking not to be named, a nurse said 64 patients are receiving treatment in the Green and Blue units on the hospital's third floor. She alone has to take care of all of them in the day shift, as there is no doctor or ward boy on the floor during the period.

Another nurse will replace her in the night shift but no doctor will be available on the floor, she said.

Dressings of many patients in the Blue unit could not be changed, as there was no doctor to oversee the work, the nurse said.

They gamble

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bore the brunt of the violence.

Police used teargas shells and batons to break up stone-throwing protesters at Motijheel commercial area, the site of Dhaka Stock Exchange.

Even though Motijheel had been the epicentre, the rampage spread to neighbouring Paltan and as far as Dhanmondi and Mirpur.

Among the worst sufferers were the school students who were trapped on the violence-wracked streets either in their cars or on rickshaws. Hundreds of commuters suffered because of huge traffic snarls caused by the rampage.

At Dhanmondi, a grade IV schoolgirl was seen shaking beside her worried mother on the street, after some protesters passed them by. They had to get down from a rickshaw to get to the school on foot through a maze of by-lanes, which were also jammed by vehicles, even buses, fleeing from the violence on Satmasjid Road.

The mother told The Daily Star, "Violence on streets is as unacceptable as manipulation of the stock market."

Such scenes were common in the areas where the protests occurred.

Many commuters were

late to work as they were stranded in traffic jams.

"I had to wait for hours for a bus to go to my office at Farmgate from Paltan," said Habib, who works at a private firm. "In the end I had to walk up to Kataban, and from there I took a rickshaw to reach somewhere close to my office."

"It usually takes me forty minutes to travel to my office. But today it took two and a half hours," he said.

Panna, who sells tea on a footpath at Dhanmondi Road-27 said, "While I was passing by the bus stand at Dhanmondi-15, I saw over hundred protesters throwing bricks at police and vehicles." He also said pedestrians and vehicles fled to nearby lanes deserting the thoroughfare.

Sub-inspector Yeasin Gazi of Mirpur police station said around 100 demonstrators took the street in front of the regional office of Dhaka City Corporation at Mirpur-2 around 1:30pm, and tired to put up roadblocks. Police dispersed the demonstrators.

The violence also forced many stores to shut down in the areas for fear of attacks.

Police detained 22 demonstrators, said Sub-inspector Sheikh Nasir Uddin of Motijheel police station.

Peaceful border

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talks at a city hotel.

Both Sikder and his Indian counterpart GK Pillai asserted that the two countries are working hard and would be in a position to resolve the problems before the visit of Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram to be followed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

"I fully endorse what my colleague, the home secretary of Bangladesh, has stated about the last two days' discussions," Pillai told the briefing, adding that the Indian home minister will visit Bangladesh at an earliest possible time.

Apart from 6.5 kilometres of undemarcated border, India has 111 exclaves within Bangladesh while Bangladesh has 51 in India. There are also issues like adversely possessed lands in both the territories and construction of military were obstacles within 150 yards of international borders.

The two neighbours have border problems since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. Bangladesh and India signed an agreement in 1974 to manage over 4,000 km of borders. Dhaka immediately ratified the accord but Delhi refrained from doing so.

However, India finally agreed to settle the border issues with Bangladesh during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's tour to India in January 2010.

The Bangladesh home secretary said the enclave problem arose before the birth of Bangladesh. "The handover of enclaves will start soon," he added.

Mentioning that Bangladesh has excellent relations with India, he said, "We discussed all the issues with a positive approach. The Indian side has responded very positively to all the outstanding problems."

The home secretary said the much-awaited power network in Dahagram Agorpotra had been completed while the Tin Bigha Corridor would soon be open -- 24 hours a day - for its residents.

"Yesterday, the secretary-level meeting agreed to implement the decisions and these will come into effect soon," he said.

About border killings, Dhaka made a strong demand to devise modalities for border management to stop it.

The home secretary-level meeting termed the killing of a minor Bangladeshi girl Felani very tragic.

Sikder said the Indian side has pledged to take necessary measures to stop killings on the frontiers.

"On the government of India and my behalf, I deeply regret the deaths of Bangladeshi nationals," GK

Pillai told the press briefing, adding that the number of deaths has come down to 31 last year which was 55 in 2009.

"Our effort would be to take all necessary steps so that no death takes place on Indo-Bangla borders and this is our commitment to you," said Pillai seeking cooperation from the villagers living in border areas and the Bangladesh border guards.

Replying to a question, the Indian home secretary said his government has ordered an independent investigation into the killing of Felani to bring the responsible people to book.

About Bangladesh's proposal of using non-lethal weapons by BSE, Pillai said the Indian border guards have to deal with terrorist elements on the borders.

EC to field

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decision, 50 upazila election officers will start working as "silent observers" in the same number of union parishads of the two constituencies and report to the EC about the prevailing situation regularly.

In addition, a number of video cameras will be installed at different places on the polling day to identify the persons responsible for any untoward incidents, EC officials said.

The fresh spell of battle of ballots between Awami League and BNP comes following the just concluded municipal elections. The two constituencies fell vacant following the deaths of two incumbent AL lawmakers.

"We are posting silent observers to monitor the situation, and video cameras will be used so nobody can influence the by-polls by any means," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain told journalists at his office yesterday.

The EC yesterday briefed the upazila election officers at its conference room about their duties.

They will remain posted until the polls are over, said Sakhawat Hossain.

Besides, the EC has decided to deploy two to three "silent observers" at each of the 13 municipalities where elections will be held also on January 27. They might begin working from two to three days before the polls.

The 13 municipalities are Parbatipur of Dinajpur; Magura, Jhalkathi and Char Fashion of Bhola; Madhabdi of Narsingdi; Jajira of Shariatpur; Madan of Netrokona; Madaripur and Daganbhuiyan of Feni; and Teknaf, Moheshkhali, Chokoria and Cox's Bazar of Cox's Bazar.

BNP blames govt for stock market crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP leaders yesterday blamed the government for the continuous slump in the share market.

At different meetings in the capital, top leaders of the opposition said the cartels, which were responsible for the stock market turmoil in 1996 during the previous Awami league-led government, are also behind the fall this time.

"Such situation arises in the share market whenever Awami League comes to power and it causes tremendous loss to small investors," said BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain at a discussion meeting at the Jatiya Press Club.

Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, a front organisation of BNP, arranged the discussion marking the 75th birth anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman.

MK Anwar, a member of BNP's national standing committee, said a vested quarter with the blessing of the AL-led government has looted around 64 thousand crore taka from the stock market in the last few days.

He was addressing another discussion on Shaheed Zia's contribution to educational development at the Jatiya Press Club.

Bangladesh's economy is not in a position for which the capital market would suffer such crisis, Anwar added.

Though the discussion meetings were organised to mark Ziaur Rahman's birth anniversary, BNP leaders' speeches mostly centred around the share market plunge.

On the just concluded municipal polls, Khandaker Mosharraf and Moudud Ahmed said despite vote rigging and other irregularities, the ruling Awami League could not perform well in the election and that proved people have registered dissatisfaction with the government.

Cherie takes

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organised by the university at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

Malaysian First Lady Datin Paduka Seri Rosma Mansur presented the keynote paper while Japanese First Lady Akio Abe spoke at the symposium.

Established in 2008, AUW is a leading institution of higher learning for women where students from 13 countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestine, Sri Lanka, USA, and Vietnam are studying.

Biswa Ijtema

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Devotees from 32 districts of the country will take part in each of the stages.

The annual event, organised by Tablighi Jamaat, features sermons on fundamental issues of Tabligh, prayers for spiritual adulation, exaltation and welfare of the Muslim community.

Tens of thousands of devotees have started gathering at the 165-acre Ijtema venue with winter clothes, blankets and cooking apparatus.

Several thousand devotees have volunteered to prepare the ground for the event. An army team has built several makeshift bridges on the river.

Engaging around 12,300 personnel from different law enforcement and intelligence agencies, a multi-tier security measure is in place in and around the venue to avert any possible threats and subversive activities.

The law enforcers have set up observation towers and installed closed-circuit televisions to watch people's movement.

Helicopters, speedboats and pick-up vans will keep patrolling the area.

Dhaka Wasa and Tongi Wasa have installed tube wells. About 2000 sanitary latrines and 150 semi pakka toilets have also been set up around the ground.

Makeshift healthcare centres, special medical teams, ambulances, water lorries and fire fighters will remain stand-by for any emergency support.

Stock efforts fall

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start of trading.

Trading on the Dhaka and Chittagong bourses started at 1:00pm, instead of 11:00am, in line with a decision of the Securities and Exchange Commission that approved a DSE proposal to cut the transaction period by two hours for now.

The circuit breaker, introduced on Wednesday, was meant to stop the trading after the General Index went down by 225 points but the breaker's manual operating system failed to do that.

Panic sell-offs by nervous investors triggered the slump, the quickest in the history of Bangladesh's capital market.

Angry investors took to the streets and vented their frustration on passing vehicles after the market was shut for the day.

They clashed with law enforcers in the financial district of Motijheel.

Investors, who trade from other areas including Dhanmondi and Mirpur in the capital, also clashed with police.

Clashes were also reported in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet, where investors took part in trade through brokers.

With yesterday's slump, the DGEN came down to 6,326 points, the lowest in six months. The downward trend made the market lose nearly 1,350 points in the last six days.

Market experts put the declining trend down to the liquidity crunch in the secondary market. But the situation has worsened for lack of confidence among investors.

The retail investors got panicked seeing no positive impacts of the regulator's measures on the market.

"Liquidity flow is slowly coming back to the market. But the main problem is to bring back confidence among investors. It should be the main focus now," said Akter Hossain Sannamat, managing director of Prime Finance and Investment.

Others say coordinated measures from the government, the regulator and stakeholders can help the

TIB survey

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was the most corrupt service sector.

Meeting sources said the evaluation committee's report was published in the SC website so that the media and people can understand the facts.

The evaluation committee said the TIB report was just made for publicity as it could not help pinpoint people involved in corruption.

It termed the TIB survey "much ado about nothing" and observed that the TIB was irresponsible in branding the judiciary as the most corrupt service sector, sources said.

However, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said considering the established survey methods, this household survey is not at all lacking merit.

Showing due respect to the apex court's observations, he told The Daily Star that it depends on which perspective the survey is being looked at.

Referring to the meeting the TIB had with the evaluation committee to discuss the survey, he said they felt the SC was trying to identify the corrupt and looking for specific corruption allegations.

He also mentioned that in the meeting the committee wanted to know case numbers and names of people who allegedly took bribes.

"We did not have the information as we did not require such type of information. Our survey was about people's experience with the service sector. We do not work to reveal corruption of individuals," said Iftekharuzzaman.

He said people involved in conducting the survey, starting from collection of information and data in the field level, were the appropriate ones required for the

market overcome the current situation.

Angry investors said they had no option but to take to the streets to see their capital shrink in the last few days.

"My portfolio value has come down to almost zero. It is driving me crazy," said a bewildered Shipon Chowdhury, who lost Tk 5 lakh in the last two days.

Many others said they now want the prime minister's intervention as measures taken by the regulator have failed to have a grip on the volatile market.

The DSE said the government should punish the persons involved in the stockmarket manipulation.

DSE President Shakil Rizvi said the government has little to do with the share prices that depend on many other variables. But it can punish anyone for violating the law.

"A crisis has arisen for diversion of funds from the market. But the market will rebound soon," he said.

Within the five minutes, the premier bourse traded more than 58.76 lakh shares and mutual fund units on a value of Tk 68 crore. Losers outnumbered gainers 172 to 8, with two securities remaining unchanged on the DSE.

Meanwhile, small investors called a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Sylhet for Sunday to protest the recent fall in prices on the DSE, reports UNB.

Mashiur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's economic affairs adviser, however, was highly critical of the street demonstration by the investors following nosedive of share prices urging all to resist them.

When pointed to the drastic fall, he said there is a pressure on the market, as some investors want windfall gain overnight.

Mashiur was speaking to reporters after inaugurating a flood protection project in Khulna.

According to him, the money pulled in the share market never came to the real investment in the industry.

"So there is no immediate impact of it," the news agency quoted him as saying.

job. He said the TIB would try to explain everything to the court after it receives the SC observation officially.

He, however, welcomed the decision to form an SC probe committee to identify corrupt people in the judiciary.

Sources said some judges told the meeting that the TIB report is vague and the media and the people will understand that it was prepared naively and in a clumsy manner.

Meeting sources said the judges commented that the TIB does not know what the judiciary actually means and it had in the survey included lawyers and their clerks and touts alongside judges.

The TIB officials have also admitted that they could not understand properly what the judiciary means and includes, the committee report said.

A few judges raised questions about the competence and credibility of TIB.

Sources said the HC judges at the meeting decided not to take any action against TIB.

Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque on December 30 formed the evaluation committee with five senior judges of the HC. The HC judges are: Justice MA Wahhab Miah, Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana, Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Justice M Imman Ali and Justice Sheikh Rezwan Ali.

The committee discussed the questionnaire and replies of its survey with TIB Trustee Board Chairman M Hafizuddin Khan and Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman on a tea party at the SC judges' lounge on January 14.

Yesterday's meeting of the judges also decided to promote 13 joint district judges to the office of additional district judge.