

# No corrupt firm to be assigned Padma bridge construction

## Says bridge division secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No corrupt firm will be assigned the construction of the US \$ 2.9 billion Padma multipurpose bridge project, said Bridge Division Secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan yesterday.

His comment came following reports that the Canadian government is investigating into corruption charges against employees of SNC-Lavalin Group Inc, one of the short-listed companies supervising the construction.

Speaking at a press briefing at the Press Information Department conference room of the Secretariat, he said none complained of any corruption or irregularity in the project.

"We often meet and talk to World Bank officials but neither the bank officials nor its country director did complain to the government about any wrongdoings," he said.

Mosharraf said many of the Bangladesh media tried to implicate the communications minister with the so-called corruption.

He said there is an eight-member committee, headed by Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, tasked with the responsibility of overseeing different tender procedures of the Padma bridge project.

"Not only the minister but also none above his position had the capacity to influence the committee," he said.

Mosharraf said everything is being done in a transparent manner. "What we tell World Bank is that the project is the

first priority of the Bangladesh government as well as the countrymen."

The evaluation report by the government to appoint SNC-Lavalin Group Inc was prepared following the World Bank guideline and was sent to the World Bank in June this year for approval, he added.

Mosharraf said tender for construction of the bridge will be issued next week but the construction will begin in April next year after all procedures are complete.

"World Bank and the other financiers of the project reached a consensus to give approval to the bidding documents. The matter is now at the final stage," he told The Daily Star.

These bidding documents regarding construction of the main bridge will soon be distributed among the five pre-qualified companies after the approval so that they can submit their complete technical and financial offers.

The firms are Samsung C&T Corporation of Korea, China Major Bridge Engineering Co Ltd, Daelim-Bam-VCI (a joint venture entity of Korea), Vinci-HCC (a joint venture of France and India) and China Communication Construction Company Ltd.

The 6.15 kilometre (km) bridge with 3.68km land-based approach viaducts on both sides of the river will connect 19 south-western districts and the capital, enhancing their access to markets, improving services and accelerating growth.

But the government is not happy due to the bureaucratic approach of the donors which is eventually delaying various infrastructure development projects. This matter was also discussed in a cabinet meeting held yesterday.

About the role of World Bank in the project, the secretary declined to make any serious comment.

He said committees comprising both local and international experts are strictly scrutinising every level of the project. "There are the financiers who are evaluating and overseeing every step. Nothing is being done without their suggestions and consent," he said.

He said the project consists of five packages including -- construction of the main bridge, river training (controlling the direction of the water flow) and construction of approach roads and toll plaza on both Maowa and Jajira points.

None of the packages were finalised and no contract was signed so far, he said, adding that not a single penny was released or used from the donors' fund.

"All the money spent so far in Padma bridge project is from the government's fund. Tk 850 crore was spent for land acquisition, rehabilitation, resettlement and compensation purposes while Tk 186 crore for designing consultancy," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Shato Nagarik, a platform of civil society members, forms a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club in the city yesterday demanding a referendum before the government seals any agreement on transit.

## Spain keen to increase trade with Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Spain has expressed keen interest to further increase its trade and investment in Bangladesh.

The newly appointed Spanish Ambassador to Bangladesh Luis Tajada Chacon said this while the envoy was presenting his credentials to President Zillur Rahman at Bangabhaban yesterday.

Zillur emphasised the need for increased trade and commercial activities with Spain. Spain can recruit more skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower from Bangladesh, he said.

Bangladesh is presently exporting products to Spain worth \$600 million while importing goods worth \$67 million.

Ambassador Luis Tajada Chacon said Bangladesh is growing up economically over the last few years, while EU countries were facing financial crisis.

The envoy mentioned that some 25,000 Bangladeshis are currently working and contributing to the country's socio-economic development.

Chacon highly appreciated Bangladesh for securing the top position in the UN Peacekeeping Mission through sending highest number of troops.

Chacon also appreciated the Bangladeshi young generation for their inerst in Spanish football players.

Secretaries to the president and high officials of the foreign ministry were present.

DHAKA TODAY

Convention

Jatiya Gonotantrik Party will organise a convention; Venue: Jatiya Press Club; Time: 11:00am.

Discussion

Deshpremik Jonogoner Mancha will hold a discussion; Venue: Gono Sangskriti Kendra; Time: 3:00pm.

Discussion

United Forum for National Solidarity will organise a discussion; Venue: Jatiya Press Club; Time: 4:00pm.

Seminar

Bangladesh Shilpa O Unnayan Parishad will hold a seminar; Venue: Dhaka Polytechnic Auditorium; Time: 11:00am.

Memorial meeting

Bangladesh Diabetic Samity will

## BABAR'S TAX EVASION Hearing adjourned 15 times

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday deferred the hearing till October 27 on charge framing against detained former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar in a case filed for dodging income tax of Tk 2.65 crore from 1999-2000 to 2008-09 fiscal years.

With this, the court had adjourned the hearing for 15 times on different excuses submitted from the defence.

Judge Mohammad Rezaul Islam of the Special Judge's Court-5 passed the order following a petition submitted by defence lawyer seeking an adjournment of the hearing.

Babar was produced before the court during the hearing.

Babar's lawyer told the court that they had

earlier filed a writ petition with the High Court (HC) challenging the legality of the case. But the hearing on the writ petition is still pending.

The prosecution opposed it and prayed for framing charge against the accused as there was no stay order on the proceeding of the case.

Deputy Tax Commissioner Syed Zakir Hossain of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) filed the case on February 14 last year against Babar, now in police custody on various criminal charges.

NBR, in its case statement, mentioned that Babar, director of Master Electronics Industries Limited, evaded Tk 2,65,44,122 in income tax on his income of Tk 8,06,80,122 from his firm for the fiscal years 1999-2000 to 2008-2009.

## NU in image crisis: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The education ministry is unhappy with the activities of the National University (NU) as it could not make expected progress, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said yesterday.

"The university is in image crisis...a progress has been marked in the overall activities of the education ministry, but we could not get expected progress from the university", he told reporters after a close-door meeting with the high-ups of the NU.

The minister said the officials and employees of the university will have to clean up the image through their work and good deeds.

Although the university made some progresses including "putting a stop to recruitment trade", introducing online admission, and setting up regional centres for decentralisation, these are not satisfactory, he added.

Nahid said a lack of coordination among

the university high officials was pointed out at the meeting, and the ministry asked the officials to hold regular coordination meeting to assess the activities and progresses.

He also said the authorities were asked to ensure transparency in income, expenditure, and budget. Alongside the authorities, the ministry would monitor if the university abides by the NU law, he added.

About the High Court's August 23 verdict that declared appointment of some NU 1,222 teachers, officials, and employees illegal, Nahid said they will take steps after receiving the copy of the verdict and after consultation with the legal experts.

"This is our first meeting where we talked about the university's ongoing problems and issues like teachers recruitment, standard of education, and so on and asked the university authorities to solve the problems in accordance with the discussion", he said.

## Welfare fund for artistes

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday decided to set up a welfare fund under Ministry of Cultural Affairs for the country's artistes.

The decision was taken at the regular weekly cabinet meeting held at the Bangladesh Secretariat with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Briefing reporters at the PID conference room after the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said the decision to form the fund came at the prime minister's directive.

Azad said the cabinet meeting also adopted a condolence motion to show respect for Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra's artistelate Ajit Roy.

## Two killed in road crashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed in separate road accidents in the city's Banani and Tongi yesterday.

One man was killed when a bus hit him while he was crossing road in the city's Banani area yesterday.

The deceased is Aktar Hossain, 35, of Namapara of Khilkhet, and an employee of Trade Syndicate Limited, of Mohakhali.

Meanwhile, a garments worker was killed in a road accident in Board Bazar area in Tongi last night.

The garments worker Md Rana, 22, of Pirgacha in Rangpur was run over by a bus at Board Bazar at 7:00 pm while he was returning home after Eid vacation.

He was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he succumbed to his injuries at 9:30pm.

## SAARC CONVENTION 'Rectify definition of trafficking'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers yesterday recommended rectifying the definition of "trafficking" in the Saarc Convention on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking to make it more effective in preventing the social menace in the region.

"The definition is limited only to prostitution and women and children and this does not cover all the illegal transport of people between the countries," said Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA).

It is not only women and children who are trafficked for prostitution, but also men who are trafficked for forced labour. These issues should be incorporated in the convention, she said.

She was speaking at a press conference organised by BNWLA and Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children at Jatiya Press Club in the city, a day ahead of the Indian premier's visit.

"We share a large border and a lot of people are illegally transported from Bangladesh to India and vice versa," said Salma.

Approximately 1,500 Bangladeshi citizens, victims of human trafficking, are in India and they are unable to come home, she added.

"When prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Manmohan Singh meet, they should consider the failings of the articles and take steps to rectify it," she added.

## Tk 75cr Japanese aid for food insecure poor

METRO DESK

The Japanese government has given the World Food Programme (WFP) US\$ 10 million or Tk 75 crore to provide food assistance to the poor communities vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change impacts in Bangladesh, says a press release.

The donation will allow the WFP to assist 80,000 extremely poor households -- some 4 lakh people -- to reduce their exposure to disasters and impacts of climate change by involving them in asset creation schemes.

The food assistance will be distributed in 13 food insecure districts including Kurigram, Gaibandha, Bogra, Sirajganj, Pabna, Jamalpur, Lalmonirhat, Bagerhat, Khulna, Satkhira, Barguna, Bhola, and Patuakhali.

The Japanese assistance will also help the WFP to implement its Enhancing Resilience (ER) programme that aims to build community and household resilient to extreme weather hazards, economic shocks, and seasonal hunger.

## Three rocket shells found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Law enforcers recovered three live rocket shells from a wooded area in Bakakura, a frontier village of Jhenaigati upazila in Sherpur district, yesterday.

Following a tip-off, a team of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-12) conducted the drive at the village around 9:00am and recovered the shells in abandoned condition.

None was arrested in this connection, said Kamal Hossain, senior assistant director of Jamalpur Rab camp.

The writings on the shells tell that those were manufactured in 1990, said Kamal, who led the drive.

The shells were kept at the Rab camp till filing of the report in the evening.

A general diary was lodged with Jhenaigati Police Station in this connection.

From May to August this year, law enforcers recovered 2,581 bullets in three separate drives from the same village and arrested two people in this connection.

## Import leather, jute goods Zillur urges Trinidad

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman yesterday urged the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago to import Bangladeshi products like leather and leather goods, jute and jute goods, ceramics and pharmaceuticals at competitive prices.

"It can also import skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower from Bangladesh," the president said when Trinidad and Tobago High Commissioner Chandradath Singh presented his credentials to him at

Bangabhaban.

Welcoming the newly appointed high commissioner, Zillur Rahman said Trinidad and Tobago as a member of the Commonwealth and G-77 has been maintaining good relations with Bangladesh over the years.

The new envoy said his country is keen to promote trade and commerce with Bangladesh.

"I hope that our relation with Bangladesh will gradually be strengthened in the future," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba) Chairman Abu Naser Khan, second left, speaks at a news conference held at the city's Jatiya Press Club yesterday demanding protection of Zinda Park in Rugganj, Narayanganj. On his right is Hafizur Rahman and on his left are Kamal Lohani and Mitali Hossain. Poba and Agrapathik Palli Samity jointly organised the conference.