

Govt to build 156 flood shelters

Ecneec okays Tk 175cr project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved a project for the construction of 156 flood shelters at a cost of Tk 175 crore.

The approval came at its meeting held at the conference room of the National Economic Council (NEC) with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The project titled "Construction of flood shelters in the flood-prone and river erosion areas" will cover 154 upazilas under 43 districts in six divisions.

Barisal division was excluded from the project.

The project has been taken up considering the scarcity of flood shelters and cyclone centres across the country. The existing number of cyclone centres and flood shelters are 2,487 and 150 respectively.

According to a planning ministry statement, the flood shelters will also be used as schools/colleges/madrassa during the non-flood season.

The project was proposed in line with the "Master plan for multipur-

pose cyclone and flood shelters" prepared by a task force formed earlier. Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury headed the task force.

Ecneec also gave nod to the revision of a project styled "Construction of 620-megawatt peaking power plants". The revised project cost stands at Tk 6,123 crore, which is 12 percent less than the original cost.

A total of 9 projects were approved in the meeting including the above-mentioned two at a cost of Tk 6,720 crore.

Dhaka seeks

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UAVs on borders with Bangladesh. We have taken up the issue with the Indian authorities for a clarification on it," foreign ministry spokesperson Shameem Ahsan, also director general (External Publicity Wing), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Giving no more details, another senior official at the foreign ministry said the clarification was sought yesterday through the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

The move came following reports in some Indian newspapers that BSF would soon deploy drones along the border with Pakistan to beef up vigilance and had planned to enforce identical aerial surveillance along the borders with Bangladesh.

"The plan to deploy UAVs is picking up pace ... We are actively pursuing it and would like to use them not only on the western border but also on the eastern border with Bangladesh," the Indian media quoted BSF Director General Subhash Joshi assaying.

Following the news reports, the BSF on Monday took a U-turn and said it had no plan to deploy drones on Bangladesh frontiers.

"We are looking for various technological measures to upgrade security along our borders. However, there is no deployment of UAVs as such and no specific proposals in this regard, too," said the BSF chief when asked to comment on this matter.

Rony

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alleging that he had beaten up its reporter Imtiaz Momin and cameraperson Mohsin Mukul on the day at his Topkhana Road office in the capital.

On August 11, two other cases were filed with Galachipa Police Station in Patuakhali against Rony, his relatives and party men on charges of extortion and ransacking business establishments.

Shamsuzzaman Linkon, organising secretary of Galachipa upazila Awami League, and Badrul Islam Khan, president of Dakua union AL, lodged the cases.

In a case statement, Linkon said a gang led by Rony had attacked a meeting arranged by Panpatti union AL at Panpatti High School on August 17, 2010, to mark the National Mourning Day.

The attackers injured the participants of the meeting and ransacked and looted a shop owned by Jahangir Hossain at a nearby market, he added.

Badrul in the other case said the accused had demanded Tk 5 lakh from Nityahari Devnath and 17 others of Ullania Bazar in Galachipa on March 25, 2012. They also snatched Tk 36,700 and three cell phones from local people on that day, the plaintiff added.

A bench of Justice Md Nizamul Huq and Justice Kashefa Husain passed the orders yesterday hearing three bail petitions filed by Rony.

Abdul Baset Majumder appeared for him while Deputy Attorney General Masud Hossain Chowdhury represented the government.

Padma bridge

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some seriousness, added the sources.

Samsung C & T Corporation of South Korea and Daelim-Bam-VCI, also a joint venture entity of South Korea, had purchased bid documents, but they have shown no interest to complete the bidding.

Vinci-HCC, a joint venture of France and India, has not even bought the tender documents. "The company attended the pre-bid meeting but is yet to buy tender documents," a senior Bridges Division official involved in the Padma bridge project told The Daily Star.

A representative of a bidder said Samsung and Daelim-Bam-VCI had purchased bid documents on request from project officials to make the bidding competitive.

"The main concern of the firms is uncertainty of fund,

especially the foreign currency," said the representative seeking anonymity.

He said although the government had decided to construct the bridge with its own fund, a section of the ruling party, including the finance minister, was still hopeful of fund from donors.

The government on June 26 floated tender for the main bridge construction and asked pre-qualified firms to submit bids by September 9.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh-Malaysia joint venture company is constructing the approach road at Janjira point of the bridge area under a Tk 1,097 crore agreement.

A Tk 250 crore tender has been floated recently for building the other approach road and service area at Mawa point.

However, tender for river training, the second largest

component (involving \$ 800 million) of the project is yet to be floated.

The situation implies tenders for the main structure and river training would not be finalised within the tenure of this government. However, the construction of the approach roads, yards and service areas will nearly be completed by this time.

The Awami League (AL) government spent Tk 200 crore for preparing the bridge design and Tk 1,400 crore on rehabilitation and resettlement, which are at the final stage.

The AL had planned to start the construction of the 6.15-kilometre rail-road bridge and complete major part of the bridge within its tenure.

However, it could not be possible as donors had cancelled funds over allegation of corruption in the project.

EU presses

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meeting at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office in the capital.

The five-member EU mission, which arrived in Dhaka on September 7 for a two-week visit, has already met with the Awami League and the Jatiya Party and will meet with the Election Commission today.

During its talks with the AL and the JP, the team stressed the need for a dialogue.

BNP Standing Committee Member MK Anwar, who led the nine-member team of the party at the meeting, said the party had informed the EU delegation that the election would not be free and fair if it was held under the present constitutional provisions.

That will be because, according to the constitutional provisions, the prime minister will remain head of the government and parliament will not be dissolved, he told journalists.

MK Anwar added: "In that case, instead of the previous caretaker government system, we have just wanted a non-party administration to oversee the polls."

He said a dialogue could take place to discuss the criteria, quality and tenure of the polls-time government. "We are very eager to sit in a dialogue."

Replying to a query, William Hanna said the EU thought the election should be transparent and credible with the participation of all political parties.

Also yesterday, the EU team discussed with the foreign secretary various technical aspects of the EU's Election Observation Mission.

After the meeting, Hanna told reporters that the visiting mission was in Dhaka to assess the feasibility and usefulness of the Election Observation Mission.

Meeting sources said the EU delegation discussed with Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque arrangements for the election observation mission and the role of the Election Commission, among other things.

Tension over Syria eases

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Referring to the planned UN resolution, the prime minister said "there would have to be consequences" if it wasn't done.

However, the western powers' tough rhetoric is weakened by the lack of enthusiasm at home for military action. Parliament has ruled out British involvement in punitive strikes, and the US president, Barack Obama, faces stiff resistance in Congress.

ALL OPTIONS

OPEN'

French President Francois Hollande and his US counterpart agreed yesterday to keep "all options open" on Syria, as Paris pushes for a UN resolution calling on Damascus to give up its chemical arms, reports AFP.

"The heads of state highlighted their preference for a diplomatic solution but they also underlined the importance of keeping all options open," Hollande's office said in a statement, after the two leaders spoke by telephone.

Amid the whirlwind of diplomatic activity focused on the response to a suspected chemical weapons attack on a Damascus neighbourhood on August 21, the civil war resumed in earnest, President Bashar al-Assad's jets again bombing rebel positions in the capital.

France wants a binding UN Security Council resolution that would provide a framework for controlling and eliminating the weapons and says that Syria would face "extremely serious" consequences if it violated the conditions.

Britain and the United States said they would work on quickly formulating a resolution.

The UN Security Council initially called a closed door meeting asked for by Russia to discuss its proposal to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control, but the meeting was later cancelled at Russia's request.

Moscow, which has previously vetoed three resolutions that would have condemned the Syrian government over the conflict, appeared strongly opposed to the continuation of any military threats to Damascus, as advocated by

Washington.

PUTIN: "NO THREAT OF FORCE"

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in televised remarks that the initiative to put Syria's chemical weapons under international control would not succeed unless the United States and its allies reject the use of force against Damascus.

The United States appeared unmoved. "For this diplomatic option to have a chance of succeeding, the threat of a US military action ... must continue," Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel told the House Armed Services Committee.

The United States and France had been poised to launch missile strikes to punish Assad's forces, which they blame for the chemical weapons attack. Syria denies it was responsible.

The White House said Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Francois Hollande had agreed in a telephone call on their preference for a diplomatic solution, but that they should continue to prepare for "a full range of responses."

Obama was due to meet Senate Democrats and Republicans to present his case for approving a potential military strike. Secretary of State John Kerry also spelled out the argument in a House hearing and was due to talk by telephone with Lavrov later in the day.

The White House said Obama, who has called the Russian proposal a potential breakthrough, would still push for a vote in Congress to authorize force when he makes a televised address to Americans later on Tuesday.

But the US congressional vote now appeared more about providing a hypothetical threat to back up diplomacy, rather than to unleash immediate missile strikes. A bipartisan group of senior members of Congress was working on a resolution that would take into account the Russian proposal.

Whether international inspectors can neutralize chemical weapons dumps while war rages in Syria remains open to question.

INTERNATIONAL

SUPPORT

The White House and the

Kremlin both said the Russian proposal was not entirely new and that Obama and Putin had discussed the principles behind it in the past. Putin's spokesman said it came up at a summit last week, reports Reuters.

With veto-wielding China also backing it, it would be the rare Syria initiative to unite global powers whose divisions have so far blocked Security Council action. Assad's main regional backer, Iran, has also signalled support, as has UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Gulf Arab states which support the rebels were skeptical, however: "It's all about chemical weapons but doesn't stop the spilling of the blood of the Syrian people," said Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa.

Syria is not a party to international treaties which ban the stockpiling of chemical weapons but is bound by the Geneva conventions that forbid using them in war. Syria has not said whether it possesses poison gas, while denying it has used it.

Western states believe Syria has a vast undeclared chemical arsenal. Sending inspectors to destroy it would be hard even in peace and extraordinarily complicated in the midst of a war.

The two main precedents are ominous: UN inspectors dismantled the chemical arsenal of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in the 1990s but left enough doubt to provide the basis for a US-led invasion in 2003. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was rehabilitated by the West after agreeing to give up his banned weapons, only to be overthrown by NATO help in 2011.

Assad's government says last month's chemical attack was the work of rebels trying to win Western military support, a scenario Washington and its allies say is not credible.

Human Rights Watch, the New York-based watchdog, said evidence strongly suggested Syrian government forces were to blame because the attack used rockets and launchers in the possession only of government forces.

JS body for passage of bill

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names to the president for appointment as judges of the High Court Division as well as the Appellate Division of the SC.

The judicial commission, as the bill has proposed, will be comprised of one senior judge each from the Appellate Division and the HC division, Public Service Commission chairman, attorney general and president of the Supreme Court Bar Association.

The bill proposed including a lawmaker nominated by the Speaker in the judicial commission. But the parliamentary body rejected the proposal and opted for replacing the legislator by the chief of the Law Commission to make the appointment process more credible.

"The government may influence the appointment process if there is a lawmaker in the Superior Judicial Commission. So the commit-

tee opted for dropping the MP from the commission," said Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haq, who piloted the bill.

Under the proposed legislation, the commission will pick competent individuals for appointment as judges to the HC Division and will also determine the number of SC judges considering the number of pending cases and other aspects.

The president, if required, will have the authority to reject or override any recommendation by the commission.

According to the current constitutional provision, a person shall be qualified for such appointment if he or she has been an advocate of the SC or has held a judicial office for at least 10 years.

The constitution also provides for "other qualifications" to be prescribed by law. But none of the successive governments has moved to enact a law prescribing these

criteria.

Legal experts said the current criteria allowed successive governments to pick persons loyal to them as SC judges without scrutinising their (candidates) academic qualifications, professional ability, goodwill and honesty.

In the wake of the prevailing situation, the proposed legislation also seeks to specify some other qualifications for individuals willing to get appointed as SC judges.

Mujibul, who was present at yesterday's meeting on a special invitation, said after the committee's recommendation the House would decide whether it would pass the bill or not.

"The consent of the leader of the House, who is also the prime minister, is very important. Upon the consent of the leader of the House, the Speaker will include the bill in the day's business for passage," he added.

Ants use

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that cohabiting guest colonies of ants can serve as an effective front line defense for a colony.

While ants are unusually free of infectious diseases, their societies are often invaded by social parasites; insects that exploit the resources of ant colonies for their own benefit and force the hosts to work harder.

Such lodgers escape detection by the social immune system of their hosts by producing bar-code like chemical recognition labels similar to the host's own, while others use brute force or obnoxious chemicals to infiltrate or usurp host colonies.

However, these unwelcome guests can come in useful for the host colony - despite the risk of being attacked from within - during times of great threats from the outside.

Researchers from the Centre for Social Evolution at the Department of Biology at the University of Copenhagen studied a colony of peaceful fungus-farming ants facing two natural enemies and reported the scenes were 'reminiscent of dramas in human history and literature'.

Raider ants, the genus *Gnamptogenys hartmani*, seeking to enter the host's home, favour a swift style of

attack to kill defenders, plunder a nest and steal food to usurp the original colony in a style of warfare not similar to Genghis Khan in the Middle Ages.

But the attackers did not reckon on the fungus-farming ants having powerful protectors - the fierce *Megalomyrmex symmetochus* guest ant parasite.

The researchers said the *Megalomyrmex* ants are the second natural enemy of the farmers and use alkaloid poison to permanently move in with a farming host colony to exploit its fungus farm at relative leisure.

While these invader ants are a lifelong burden for the farmers, they can turn out to be a life-saving asset when mobile raiders threaten them, as the guest ants rise to the defense of their hosts.

The scientists found that the guest ant defenses are so effective that they not only kill raiders, but their mere presence greatly decreases the probability of a raid.

The study illustrates how sophisticated and subtle co-evolutionary processes driven by natural selection can be.

The results not only show that the idea that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' can work in the world of ants, but also that natural selection can maintain lesser evils when that helps prevent greater harm.

WORKERS' WAGE

RMG makers' no to big hike

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Garment owners in the Chittagong region did not agree to a big wage hike for garment workers because of the financial "constraints" of small and medium factory owners.

Factory owners in the region expressed their concerns over the issue at the first Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in the port city yesterday.

In a recent meeting, the workers' representative in the wage board recommended a minimum of Tk 8,114 in monthly salary, excluding other benefits. At present, the minimum wage is Tk 3,000 a month.

"The owners want to increase the salary for the workers, but only the adjustment of inflationary pressure in the economy," said Arshad Jamal Dipu, the owners' representative on the board.

But he declined to disclose the amount garment owners in the region had agreed to pay.

The BGMEA has been holding meetings with the owners in Dhaka and Chittagong before finalising the salary structure for the garment workers, after the government formed the wage board on June 13.

The EGM for the owners in Dhaka region is to take place tomorrow.

Dipu said of the nearly 4,000 active garment factories across the country, 2,200 are small and medium, and a majority of them do not have the capacity for a big increase.

He said 80 percent of garment factories in the Chittagong region are small and medium.

The fourth meeting of the wage board held on September 2 in Dhaka failed to fix the monthly pay, as the owners' representative did not propose any amount.

The BGMEA will sit with the wage board members on September 17 to finalise the salary structure.

Earlier in November 2010, the government raised the minimum monthly wage of garment workers to Tk 3,000 from Tk 1,662.

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