

PADMA RIVER TRAINING BID

Consultant for probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Padma bridge project consultant has suggested that the communications ministry should investigate the allegations brought by two bidders that the third bidder, Chinese company Sinohydro, is not eligible to bid for the river training job.

The issue must be resolved before the bids evaluation process proceeds further, Maunsell Aecom, the consultant, said in a letter to project director Shafiqul Islam.

Sinohydro, Korean Hyundai and Belgian Jan De Nul submitted financial proposals to the Bridges Division on June 19. Evaluation of their bids is going on.

Hyundai and Jan De Nul separately wrote to the communications ministry that Sinohydro was currently under temporary suspension by the World Bank and thus not eligible to bid for the river training work.

The Chinese company in its proposal offered the lowest price, Tk 9,224 crore, for the job. It has additionally offered a 5.6 percent discount on its offer, slashing the price down to Tk 8,778 crore.

Hyundai and Jan De Nul have offered to do the same job for Tk 12,122 crore and Tk 12,324 crore.

The consultant suggested that Bangladesh Bridges Authority should

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Locals of Shahjahanpur in the capital collect drinking water from a pump at Rajarbagh Police Lines around 10:30pm on Wednesday. They say they are getting stinky water through the supply lines to their homes. *Inset*, jars are being taken on a van to a home.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Where rules are broken at whim

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vehicles behind from moving on.

And of course, like any other intersection of the city, pedestrians here prefer jaywalking to using the footbridge, adding to the already troubled traffic at the roundabout.

With vehicles honking, bus helpers shouting for passengers, drivers cursing one another, traffic police whistling frantically and jaywalkers hurrying across the roads, the intersection practically turns into pandemonium almost every single day.

The congestion on the road to the airport is mainly caused by the vehicles from the Cantonment area heading to Banani Road 12 directly across the road, halting a heavy flow of vehicles going straight.

After crossing Banani 12, vehicles to the airport and Uttara direction have to wait at Kakoli intersection for about 10 minutes for the green signal. And just when the green light turns on, hordes of jaywalkers force the drivers to halt

again. Though there is a footbridge right there, pedestrians hardly use it.

The vehicles coming from the direction of the airport also face a long tail-back on the stretch leading to the ramp of Mohakhali flyover.

Traffic police are often blamed by commuters for their leniency in taking actions against both the errant bus drivers and jaywalkers.

A high official of the traffic police said they are taking actions against vehicles but can do nothing to stop the huge number of jaywalkers.

Pointing to the narrow entry to the DOHS area, he said, "There is a modern traffic signal system here [at the intersection] but it cannot be used due to the rail crossing at the DOHS gate through which 77 trains pass every day".

Sergeant Nasir Uddin Bhuiyan of Gulshan traffic zone said though they file around 40 cases against errant vehicles every day, they need more manpower for a stricter enforcement of traffic rules.

Another traffic sergeant said 12 constables, six traffic sergeants and one sub-inspector work at the intersection in three shifts but the manpower is not enough.

Sometimes police have to make way for VIP vehicles by stopping other vehicles, triggering snarl-ups, he added.

Furthermore, knee-deep water inundates both sides of the heavily used road during rains due to a poor drainage system, causing further traffic congestion, he said wishing not to be named.

Another colleague of this officer suggested that the authorities undertake special drives to prevent jaywalking.

Former executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board SM Salehuddin said there is a plan to construct two loops of Mirpur-Airport Road Flyover and Bus Rapid Transport (BRT-3) lanes. If these plans are implemented, commuters may find some relief at the intersection.

Rising population

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unbearable," he told The Daily Star.

"The existing traffic and water-logging problems of the city show the fallout of the over-population," he added.

Environmental and Joint Secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon Iqbal Habib forecast a bleak scenario in the capital, considering the density of its population.

He feared that clashes would occur among the Dhaka dwellers in future for access to city services.

Titled "World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2014 Revision", the UN report projected Dhaka would become the 6th most crowded city by 2030 with a population of over 2.7 crore.

By 2050, the majority of the world's megacities will be in Asia, according to the report.

While cities of the developed world such as New York topped the chart of the most populous urban agglomerations six decades back, the current

trend shows that low and lower-middle income countries are increasingly dominating the list.

Besides Dhaka, Congo's capital Kinshasa, India's Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Pakistan's Karachi and Philippines' Manila are now among the 30 most populous cities of the world.

The report found that just eight of the 30 largest cities were in countries that the World Bank defines as high income, The New York Times (NYT) reports.

The NYT quoted John R Wilmoth, director of the UN's population division, as saying that as people leave the countryside because of decreasing need for agricultural workers, the important question will be whether cities have an industrial economy that can provide jobs and an infrastructure that can allow the new residents to live in acceptable conditions.

He said that it was easier and less expensive to provide housing, health

Two killed

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Hazrat Ali, 35, son of Mahtab Biswas of Harinakundu upazila.

On information that Rashid was holding a secret meeting with his three cohorts at Chatar village, a police team reached the spot around 3:00am, said Fazlur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kotchandpur Police Station.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, the outlaws opened fire on them, forcing them to retaliate, the OC said.

Rashid sustained bullets during the gunfight and fell on the ground while his cohorts managed to flee. He was whisked off to Kotchandpur Upazila Health Complex where he was declared dead.

Police recovered a pipe gun and three bullets from the scene, he added.

Meanwhile, Ershadul Kabir, OC of Harinakundu Police Station, said a patrol team of police cordoned off Rishkhali Amtala area where some PBCP members were holding a meeting around 2:00am yesterday.

At one stage, the outlaws opened fire on law enforcers, prompting them to fire back, the OC said.

Hazrat was caught in the line of fire and died on the spot, he said.

Police recovered a gun, two bullets and six bombs from the spot.

The body was sent to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

The terrible price Gaza kids pay

FROM PAGE 1

came after years of IVF treatment. An only child, she was the apple of her grandparents' eyes and they had been constantly cautioning her that she should not stray far from home in these dangerous times.

"Our little girl was playing in our garden when it happened. The Israelis bombed a house across the street: the blast came straight through our house – then I saw my daughter lying in blood," said Masri. "She was injured badly in the head, so we fear very much."

Mariam is one among the extraordinarily large number of children who have been victims since Benjamin Netanyahu's government launched Operation Protective Edge: 22 are among the 103 dead, and no less than 70 per cent of the 700 injured comprise boys and girls, or women, according to Palestinian medical authorities.

Ashraf al-Qadri, information director at al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City warned of a "catastrophic effect" on young lives if the spiral of violence continues. There is no obvious explanation for this trend in child casualties.

Many residents, however, maintain that missiles and bombs aimed at the homes of militants considered legitimate targets by the Israelis have also hit neighbouring family homes. This claim would run counter to repeated insistence by the Israeli authorities that the air strikes are being carried out with surgical precision to avoid collateral damage.

Dr Nabil Sharqawi had been treating many of the child patients at al-Shifa Hospital. "They are difficult to cope with emotionally. We are medics, but we are also only human, and to see severe trauma on children is very distressing. Mariam has suffered brain damage. We first have to hope that she lives, then we will see whether she can speak again, walk again, or see again. Unfortunately, we'll have more cases like this coming in."

As he spoke, there were loud explosions of ordnance landing not far away and, a little later, the whooshing noise of rockets being launched into Israel.

Dr Sharqawi showed the photograph of a young boy with terrible wounds. "I keep thinking about him. He was brought in yesterday, 10 years old. He had lost both his arms and a leg. But he was fully conscious, he said to me: 'Please doctor stop this pain.' But there was very little we could do: he died soon afterwards."

Gaza City is a relatively small place and the ripples from the human damage had spread through the community. Yasmeen Dawass, a 22-year-old medical student working as The Independent's translator had been worried about a fellow student who was travelling on his motorbike on Thursday when he was hit in an air strike.

Ms Dawass did not know what had happened to Musab Dahir; she came across him on the bed next to Mariam, both his legs had been amputated and part of his right arm had gone.

"He was just an ordinary guy, not involved in firing rockets or anything like that. He was just riding along the street; why did they do this? He was going to be a doctor, he was going to help people", she said.

In a nearby ward lay two young victims, cousins, both aged five. Nuraddin had suffered head injuries. He lost his parents when missiles slammed into his home. Kinan had been hit on the chest and leg by shrapnel; his father and sister died in the same attack.

The house, in Beit Hanoun district, was deliberately targeted from the air, by a drone. It had belonged to Hafez Hamad, who was accused by Israel of belonging to the group Islamic Jihad. Killed with him were six other members of his family including his wife, mother, two brothers and a niece aged 21.

Sitting beside the cousins, their 55-year-old aunt Amal said: "Nuraddin has been unconscious. Kinan knows about his father and sister – he asks about them, but he does not say anything at all about the attack.

"I don't know what effect it will have on them when they grow up. Will they hate the Israelis and want revenge, or will they keep it away from their minds and forget about it? I personally wish they would forget about it. So many of us want this cycle to stop; we want peace, we are all very tired of war."

But there was little taste for reconciliation in the family home where shattered glass and debris from the blast lay on the floor with family and friends gathered. With her arm around Adem, her four-year-old grandson, Hafeth Hamad exclaimed: "Of course we need to fight back. The Israelis are threatening to send in troops – let them do so, then they will see how our men, and, yes, our women will fight. Why should we let them just carry on making orphans over here.

"They come every two years and kill more, they want to exterminate the Palestinians and the world just lets them do that. No one is helping us."

The feeling of abandonment is a pervasive one in Gaza. Dr Qadri at al-Shifa Hospital acknowledged that medical supplies available at Ramallah, the Palestinian administrative capital in the West Bank, have failed to arrive. Hamas and Fatah, which controls the West Bank, are supposed to be in a government of national unity, but there have been signs of cracks in the recently formed alliance.

"We are looking beyond Ramallah for help; we have asked lots of international organisations urgently for aid, but all we have got so far have been promises," he said. "We are running short of medicine, of equipment. Half the ambulances can't run because of lack of fuel."

on the Palestinian people.

Khaleda also called upon the United Nations and the international community to mount pressure on Israel to stop its destructive military operation.

The death toll from five days of Israeli air offensive in Gaza rose to more than a hundred, and the air campaign showed no sign of stopping on Saturday.

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Listing numerous health problems from food adulterants and contaminants, Dr Tahmeed pointed out that the number of cancer patients in Bangladesh would increase to nearly 5 lakh in 2035 from 2,32,868 in 2012, according to a recent study.

The chemicals used in food items include formalin, calcium carbide, sodium cyclamate, colouring agents, dye, urea, DDT, aldrin, chlordane, heptachlor, melamine, burnt engine oil, hormone and sulphuric acid.

Studies have also found the presence of heavy metals, antibiotics and pesticides in foods. Also, there are major loopholes in hygiene practices that cause microbial growth in food.

Up to 60 percent of food samples tested by the Institute of Public Health were found contaminated and adulterated.

Adulterated foods have serious health impacts, which can cause diseases like cancer, kidney, liver and renal failures, memory loss, respiratory problems, infertility, kidney stone and damage to cardiac system, mentioned Dr Tahmeed.

The recent actions, he added, by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police and mobile courts had raised public awareness, but this was only a tiny part of what actually needed to be done.

He suggested conducting a well-designed study to know the extent of food adulteration and contamination, establishing a standard of food quality and maintaining it strictly.

Food and nutrition experts should also strongly monitor imported fruits and food items. "Before they enter Bangladesh, we have to make sure that they are not adulterated or contaminated."

Prof Hamidul Huq of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) said business people were the key actors behind the vicious cycle of treating foods with chemicals.

"But police are going after the poor traders, seizing their mangoes and destroying them. By doing so, you are snatching their whole capital they borrow from microcredit organisations," he noted.

"The producers and consumers are not responsible [for adulteration of foods]... We'll have to hit at the root of the problem."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct studies to know the extent of adulteration

Monitor imported fruits

Ensure proper food-labelling

Develop a flawless formalin-testing kit

The government, said the ULAB teacher, cannot escape its responsibility for ensuring safe food. "No progress would be made if we just limit ourselves to penalising the small traders or boycotting fruits."

Mohiuddin Babar, a consultant of mobile phone operator Robi, said the use of chemicals in foods has widened because of industrialisation, scientific development and population growth.

Consumers' faith in the government agencies responsible for tackling adulteration has waned due to public perception of law enforcers' corruption, he added. In this connection, he cited an example: there were more consumers in a city restaurant that was punished recently for food adulteration.

Therefore, strong enforcement of the law is a must, he observed. Babar urged a social movement like the one against acid throwing that can prompt the government to take effective action.

Prof Imran Rahman, vice chancellor of ULAB, said adulteration was taking place mainly at local level and that there is a cycle of corruption in it, which had expanded over the years.

The country has a chance to forge a movement against the problem as it concerns everybody, he noted.

Golam Sarwar, public analyst of Dhaka South City Corporation, said the new Food Safety Act, 2013 does not categorically specify the role of the local government bodies.

The government has enacted laws targeting formalin, but there are other hazardous chemicals which are used for treating foods. It should be taken into consideration seriously, added the official.

He suggested establishing scientific post-harvest management of crops so that traders can follow it to keep them safe until delivery to the consumers.

Certain pesticides or chemicals might

be necessary in some food items, but acceptable limits of those have to be fixed, pointed out Sarwar.

Kamal Prashad Das, a director of Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI), said farmers usually did not know how much pesticides they needed to use due to ignorance.

"We need to educate them in the best agricultural practices, and create awareness among the traders," he noted, adding that if a scientific management system was developed, the problems would ease.

He insisted on changing the preparation of roadside food items. Enforcement of the Food Safety Act, 2013 can address the problem to a great extent, he observed.

Aman Ullah, chairman of World Orphan Centre, suggested running an awareness campaign through NGOs across the country. Social networking websites like Facebook can also be used in the campaign, he added.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said it was unfortunate that people were buying poisonous food and feeding it to their children with their hard-earned money.

"Unfortunately, this is the reality. For long, we have known that markets are flooded with harmful chemicals and we are consuming them. Where is the evidence of a much-needed political will to address the issue?" he questioned.

It is imperative that a social movement be waged against food contamination, added Mahfuz Anam.

Speakers suggested that the authorities concerned develop a flawless formalin testing kit and set up adequate laboratories to test food items for contamination. Besides, they should also ensure a proper labelling of products and items taken off shelves in shops before their expiry dates.

Dr Shahed Imran of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Dr Mainul Hasan of Green Life Medical College and Hospital, Akhtar Kamal Talukder, deputy managing director of Eastern Bank, Kalimur Rahman of Rotary Club of Uttara, Jamil Ahmed of Brac University, Salehuddin Ahmed, managing editor and Shahnoor Wahid, special supplements editor of The Daily Star, also spoke at the round table.